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STUDIES IN  
LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND CRITICISM  
NUMBER 3

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ETHNIC IDEALS OF THE BRITISH  
ISLES

BY

CONSTANCE RUMMONS, A. M.

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LOUISE POUND, Ph. D., Department of English  
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H. H. VAUGHAN, Ph. D., Department of Romance Languages

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# I

## ETHNIC IDEALS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

### INTRODUCTION

1. The history of a people can be read truly only in the light of its ideals. To study only the recorded acts of men is to see only a series of phenomena that are often incomprehensible and apparently erratic. What a mad affair the Crusades must seem to one who knows nothing of mediæval religious ideals! How inexplicable would appear the courageous resistance of Belgium to a student in a later age who should have no knowledge of contemporary thought, and should be unable to see the principles for which she stood! Any judgment of a human action which leaves out of account the ideas which prompted it must be vain: it is only by means of a sympathetic comprehension of men's ideals that we may justly estimate their achievements and their failures. We cannot know the reality of history so long as we are content with an outward view.

Racial ideals may be bodied forth in many ways. Indeed, if they are truly ideals, they must be reflected in every phase of racial life. Greek ideals are expressed as much in the Parthenon as in the works of Aristotle or the battle of Marathon, and are equally contrasted with mediæval ideals as expressed in a Gothic cathedral, the theology of Thomas Aquinas, or the First Crusade. But more concretely than anywhere else they are embodied in the heroes of racial myth and legend, those creatures of the popular fancy, molded in the image, not of men as they are, but of men as they would be.

It has frequently been pointed out that imagination is the mother of discontent. Men who have no faculty for depicting to themselves a different state of things from that they know remain satisfied with their lot: they are not the stuff of which revolutionists are made. But it would be possible to defend the converse thesis: that it is discontent which gives birth to imagination. Man, plodding on his own two feet, watches the graceful flight of a bird, and straightway he dreams of angels.

Of such character are most of the earlier creations of the human fancy. Feeling the irksome limitations of time and space imposed on him by his own nature, man pictures beings which, though like himself in other points, are yet free from these limitations,—beings with immortal life, or capable of transporting themselves from place to place at will. Accordingly he pictures in his heroes his own desires, and in them he lives the fuller and freer life that is denied to himself.

In the realm of morals man has equally realized his own imperfections,—a realization that is practically universal among all men who have risen above the state of savagery. Simultaneously with this realization comes the setting up of ideal standards of conduct,—standards to which man would conform if he could and by which he judges the conduct of others as well as his own. Such standards may be expressed by man in two forms,—one, the abstract form of moral maxims, the other, the concrete form of a hero who himself embodies the standard and exemplifies it in his conduct.

The importance of the latter form as a means of popular education can hardly be over-estimated. "Even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things, by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste. . . . So it is in men, most of which are childish in the best things, till they be cradled in their graves,—glad they will be to hear the tales of Hercules. Cyrus. Æneas; and hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valor, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically set out, they would swear they be brought to school again." What Sydney wrote of Elizabethan England is true in all ages and among all nations. The Greeks recognized in Homer "the schoolmaster of Hellas," and made his poems the principal part of the curriculum of their schools. But among primitive and semi-

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<sup>1</sup>Sydney, *Apologie for Poetrie*.

civilized peoples particularly, traditional literature is one of the chief means of transmitting racial ideals. Such literature is, therefore, a valuable source for the study of the ideals, especially the moral ideals, of a people.

2. The object of this essay is the study and comparison of the ideals of the various inhabitants of the British Isles, from the earliest times to the end of the Middle Ages, as exemplified in certain of the heroes of their popular literature. For this purpose I have selected Beowulf as the typical hero of the Anglo-Saxons, Cuchulainn for the Irish, and the Arthur of Malory for the Middle English. Scarcity of materials makes it impossible to choose any single hero from the early Welsh literature; therefore it has been decided to consider the different heroes presented to us in the *Mabinogion* and the early Welsh poetry.

The study of these characters makes obvious the differences in temperament and culture between the peoples that created them. Beowulf is a sturdy loyal hero, who champions his people, unafraid, against perils by land and sea. Life is to him a scarcely intermittent struggle, whose respites of feasting and pleasure are brief at best. He knows his strength, and glories in it when boasts are exchanged at the banquet table. But he has no illusions: the inevitability of fate is clear to him. He knows his appointed hour must come, and he is resolved to meet it calmly. And so he does, fatally wounded by the poisonous bite of the dragon, while fighting, as ever, in the defense of his people. They, sorrowing, praise him as a wise king, liberal of gifts, kind to all men. A stern existence was his, and stern and steady were his virtues. The calm, uninflamable Germanic temperament, slow and reflective, is admirably revealed in his character.

Far different is the wild Irishman, Cuchulainn. Physically, he is gifted with a strength far more exaggerated than Beowulf's, combined with a dexterity that enables him to perform the feats of a gymnast and of a juggler. His

appearance is fantastic in the extreme: he is endowed with extra digits and hair of three colors; while in the rage of battle he undergoes a hideous and remarkable distortion that strikes terror to the hearts of foes. In his extreme youth he performs prodigious exploits, and his later deeds fulfill his early promise. His terrible combats, however, are usually of his own seeking and for his personal aggrandizement, seldom in the defense of his country. He meets his death at an early age, entrapped by the magical wiles of his enemies. He is ever rash and headstrong, subject to fits of temper, followed sometimes, but not always, by generous attempts to make amends. Women, with whom Beowulf had little to do, adore Cuchulainn, even when he treats them with discourtesy or with violence. His powers and his deeds are the admiration and the envy of men. He is ever eager for fame, and brooks no rivalry. Thus, in his rage, he slays his old friend, Ferdia, for daring to come against him when he is holding the ford against Medb's champions. So, also, he slays his only son, who defies him when he demands his name. His poignant regret cannot undo the consequences of his wrath, but it makes a powerful appeal to our sympathy for this hero, who is in some respects so much a child. Perhaps its very youthfulness is the secret of the great charm of the Celtic temperament. Prudence, caution, second-thought, the colder virtues of age do not belong to it. It is ever fiery, unmanageable, quick-witted and quick-tempered, selfish with the thoughtless selfishness of youth, forever rushing into actions and forever bewailing the consequences of its mistakes.

The Cymric heroes represent the Celtic temperament at a later period, when the refining influence of chivalry had imposed a restraint upon wilder extravagance. They are romantic, rather than fantastic, gentler in manner and spirit. Their deeds are not feats of prodigious strength, but reveal only the permissible exaggeration of romance. The dreamy Welsh fancy casts an enchanting faery glamour



over their characters and achievements, which sometimes deepens to a tinge of mysticism.

The Arthurian legends in their ultimate form, the *Morte Darthur*, represent the spirit and ideals, not of mediæval England only, but of most of Western Europe, which was then remarkably homogeneous in culture. The framework of the legends was Cymric, but every nation had a hand in shaping them. They thus represent, as did the culture of the period, a fusion of Germanic and Celtic ideals, greatly modified by the spirit of Catholic Christianity and by what of Latin culture it had kept alive. Arthur, regarded as the founder and exemplar of the great mediæval institution of chivalry, was the hero *par excellence* of mediæval civilization. Honorable, generous, brave, just and merciful, gentle in demeanor and humble in his own estimation, courteous to all, he is the very pattern of knighthood. As a ruler, he upheld the chivalric ideal to his court, establishing the great order of the Round Table, whose members were pledged to act always as true knights. He might well be called the culture hero of mediæval Europe.

3. It is noteworthy that each of these heroes was of noble or royal birth. Cuchulainn, indeed, was the son of a Celtic deity, metamorphosed, as were all his kind after the coming of Christianity, into a fairy; and several of the Welsh heroes are similarly provided with divine progenitors. Beowulf, whose father was not a king, though his mother was a royal princess, is the lowest in birth of those whom we are to study. There is, in fact, little reference to class distinctions in *Beowulf*. When Hrothgar's coast-guard exclaims

"no henchman he,  
worthied by weapons, if witness his features,  
his peerless presence!"

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<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 249-251. This and all other quotations from *Beowulf* follow Professor Gummere's translation in *The Oldest English Epic*. (1909.)

he may refer to the external evidences either of aristocratic birth or of superior character,—which of these is intended is rather hard to tell. In general, we infer that the society of *Beowulf* was almost homogeneous, and that warriors were distinguished usually for character and achievements rather than for their superior birth. Indeed, English society remained comparatively simple down to the time of the Conquest,—the father of King Harold began life as a cow-herd.

A clearer differentiation between classes may occasionally be seen in the Irish society of the Ulster cycle. There we have servants, who are distinctly considered as inferior to the aristocracy of warriors. It is beneath Cuchulainn's dignity, for instance, to kill a charioteer.<sup>1</sup> However, society was still fairly simple when a smith entertained a king and his train at dinner,<sup>2</sup> and kings and queens alike went on cattle-raids.<sup>3</sup>

Class-distinctions are very plainly drawn in the Welsh tales. When Manawyddan undertakes to win his bread by working at a trade, his family protest that it is unworthy of his rank, and when his competitors, driven out of business by his skill, band themselves to slay him, his fiery stepson, Pryderi, wishes to meet them in arms and considers it dishonorable to run away from tradesmen, even in superior numbers.<sup>4</sup> This episode shows a distinct differentiation of the military aristocracy from the manufacturing class, and points also to the existence of organizations resembling the trade-guilds, if not identical with them.

The aristocratic elements in the *Morte Darthur* are so obvious that it is not necessary to point them out. The

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<sup>1</sup>Eleanor Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature* (1898), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, "The Táin bó Cuailgne," p. 111. See also Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, (1906), p. 11, "Táin bó Fraich," etc.

<sup>4</sup>*The Mabinogion*, Translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. Everyman's Library edition, (1906), p. 51.

Arthurian literature was pre-eminently a literature of the aristocracy, written for kings and courts. Yet the stories had a vitality among the people, too; and in a certain sense they represent the people. For a small class, no matter how efficient in a military way, cannot rule the masses of the people by force alone: government must always be, in some measure, by the consent of the governed. No aristocracy that is universally detested can continue to exist: it can only endure because the populace admire the aristocrats and their ideals. The basis of feudalism was the esteem in which the knightly virtues were held by the common people. Hence we are justified in taking Arthur as the type of the mediaeval hero.

4. The sources upon which this study is based are, as has been intimated, the literary monuments of the peoples in question. The manuscript of *Beowulf* is one of the oldest in the English tongue, dating from the tenth century. The date of composition is not certain, but the weight of opinion seems to favor the seventh century or the beginning of the eighth. The *Beowulf* legend is Continental in origin, but had very probably passed into England before assuming final shape. In any case the peoples among whom it originated were closely allied in blood, language, and customs, to the Angles and Saxons; and the inferences which may be drawn from it have validity when applied to the latter also.

The Irish tales of which Cuchulainn is the principal figure are grouped together as the "Ulster cycle," or the "Cuchulainn cycle," and are among the earliest examples of Celtic literature. The manuscripts in which most of them are found are of the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, the most famous being the eleventh-century *Leabhar na hUidri* (*Book of the Dun Cow*), a copy of an older manuscript of the same name, which contains among other stories a version of the "Irish epic," the *Táin bó Cuailgne*, the longest and most important tale of the cycle. The dates of compo-

sition are matters of controversy: some may be as early as the sixth or seventh century, and few of them can be later than the eleventh. The material is at least partly mythological, though the Irish annalists of the ninth to twelfth centuries endeavored to give it a historical background. In origin it appears to be later than the "mythological cycle," which relates the deeds of the gods, but it has many points of connection with the former.<sup>1</sup>

The sources for the Welsh heroes are two, the older tales of Lady Guest's *Mabinogion*, and the poems of the four "ancient books" of Wales. The manuscript of the *Mabinogion* stories dates from the fourteenth century. The first four tales, which constitute the *Mabinogi* of the four branches, are mythological and prehistoric in origin, but in their present forms are probably not much older than the eleventh century. The next two stories, which are not of great importance in our study, originated in the Roman period or later. The first two of the Arthurian tales, *Kilhwch and Olwen* and the *Dream of Rhonabwy*, belong to the period before Continental influence had modified the aboriginal forms of the Arthurian legend, probably to the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> The manuscripts of the four "ancient books" were written from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. The dates of composition of the poems they contain are highly uncertain, but it would be safe to say that most of them are at least several hundred years older than the manuscripts, while, according to Skene, some belong to the sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For the manuscripts and dates of composition, see *Encyclopedia Britannica* (eleventh edition) "*Celtic Literature*," I, also Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, Introduction. For the mythological aspects, see MacCulloch, *Celtic Mythology*, Ch. XII.

<sup>2</sup>*Mabinogion*, Introduction by R. Williams.

<sup>3</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, Introduction. See also *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "*Celtic Literature*," IV.

Concerning the *Morte Darthur* a brief statement will be sufficient. It was compiled, "oute of certeyn booke of frensshe," in the year 1469-70, "by syr Thomas Maleore knyght," and published by Caxton in 1485. Malory's exact sources are not known, but they were probably some versions of the French prose romances of Merlin, Launcelot, Tristram, etc.<sup>1</sup> His version is important as being the definitive form of the Arthurian romances. Coming, as it does, just at the end of the Middle Ages, it forms a fitting monument to mediaeval culture and ideals.

## II

### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

5. It may, perhaps, be said that the physical characteristics of a hero are unimportant in such a study as this,—that they have small bearing upon the ideals of a people. But a little thought should show that this is not the case. Much is to be learned of the habits and aspirations of a folk from the physical traits with which they have endowed their favorite legendary heroes. If such traits are seldom mentioned, that, too, is significant. Certain it is, at any rate, that the difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the Irish ideals is as marked in the physical characteristics of Beowulf and Cuchulainn as in any other characteristics.

6. It is, of course, natural that one of the earliest of man's ideals should be the preternaturally strong man. Living under primitive conditions, contending with the forces of nature, often outmatched in power by the brutes with which he must strive, he dreams of a being, one of his own kind, who yet is able to tear up trees and to wield them as weapons, and to grapple with the huge beasts of the forests and the wilds and rend them asunder. It is such dreams as these that have given us a Hercules, a Samson, a Beowulf.

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<sup>1</sup>For full discussion, see Sommer, *Studies on the Sources of Le Morte Darthur*, in Malory, *Morte Darthur*, III.

Sheer strength is one of Beowulf's most prominent characteristics. We are early informed that he is famous for having

"thirty men's  
heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand."

He fights usually in primitive fashion, hand to hand, without aid of weapons: indeed, we are told that

'twas granted him not  
that ever the edge of iron at all  
could help him at strife: too strong was his hand,  
so the tale is told, and he tried too far  
with strength of stroke all swords he wielded,  
though sturdy their steel; they steaded him not.'

This, however, seems an exaggeration, for a sword,—not of mortal make, it is true,—saved his life in the combat with Grendel's dam, and in his account of his swimming-match with Breca he speaks of using his sword against the "nicors":

"Me thus often the evil monsters  
thronging threatened, with thrust of my sword,  
the darling, I dealt them due return."

But with Grendel he wrestled bare-handed, and here the might of his terrible grasp is proved indeed:

Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils  
that never he met in this middle-world,  
in the ways of the earth, another wight  
with heavier hand-gripe; at heart he feared,  
sorrowed in soul,—none the sooner escaped!"  
\* \* \* \* \*

Wonder it was that the wine-hall firm  
in the strain of their struggle stood, to earth  
the fair house fell not; too fast it was

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<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 379-380.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2681-2687.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 559-561.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2682-2687.

within and without by its iron bands  
 craftily clamped; though there crashed from sill  
 many a mead-bench—men have told me—  
 gay with gold where the grim foes wrestled.<sup>1</sup>  
 \* \* \* \* \*

For him the keen-souled kinsman of Hygelac  
 held in hand, hateful alive  
 was each to other. The outlaw dire  
 took mortal hurt, a mighty wound  
 showed on his shoulder, and sinews cracked,  
 and the bone-frame burst.<sup>2</sup>

Besides Beowulf's strength of grasp, he had another remarkable physical endowment,—his strength and endurance as a swimmer. In boyhood, out of bravado, he, with a comrade, Breca, undertook the extraordinary feat of remaining for a week in the ocean. In this test of skill and endurance, Beowulf, although attacked by monsters, was successful, as he is not too modest to declare when Unferth, one of Hrothgar's warriors, repeats a false report of his failure:

"Truth I claim it,  
 that I had more of might in the sea  
 than any man else, more ocean-endurance."

It is another swimming-feat which brings the epic into its closest relations with recorded history. Gregory of Tours chronicled the raid on Frisian territory by the Geats under Hygelac, in which the invaders were defeated and their leader fell. After this defeat, according to the poem, Beowulf, having avenged his uncle's death on his slayer, escaped by swimming—apparently across the ocean to his home.

Thence Beowulf fled  
 through strength of himself and his swimming  
 power,  
 though alone, and his arms were laden with  
 thirty  
 coats of mail when he came to the sea!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 771-777.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 813-818.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 532-534.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2359-2365.

Of a somewhat different character are the endowments of Cuchulainn. While his native powers are in many ways more marvelous than those of the Teutonic hero, they are but little stressed in comparison with his skill and dexterity. In one passage, in the *Wooing of Emer*, there are enumerated no less than twenty-three extraordinary "feats" which he learned of Scathach, the warrior-woman to the east of Alban (Great Britain): "as well the apple-feat as the thunder-feat, the blade-feat, the supine-feat, and the spear-feat, the rope-feat, the body-feat, the cat's feat, the salmon-feat of a chariot-chief," etc. It is this dexterity, particularly in the feat of the *gae-bulga*, which is of most avail to Cuchulainn in his many combats.

But even before his education by Scathach, he showed remarkable prowess. At five years of age he came first to the court of his uncle, Conachar, king of Ulster. He beguiled himself on the journey by throwing before him one after another his silver ball, his hurling stick, his javelin, and his spear, and then running forward so rapidly as to catch them all before they could fall to the ground.<sup>1</sup> Arrived at his destination, he introduced himself by overthrowing the whole "boy-troop" of Emania, some one hundred and fifty strong. A year after this, he slew the ban-dog of Culann, which was so terrible that no grown man dared face it. To make amends, he did watchdog's service in its place, whence he received his name, Cuchulainn—*i. e.*, "hound of Culann."<sup>2</sup>

Not content with these accomplishments, he persuaded his uncle to let him assume arms at the mature age of seven. Nor could any arms nor chariot serve him save Conachar's own: the others all broke when he tried them. Then, setting out to achieve some adventure, he fought and killed

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136. Compare Hiawatha's feat of shooting an arrow into the air and running forward so swiftly that the arrow fell behind him. (*Hiawatha*, IV, ll. 7-10.)

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 137 ff.



the three sons of Nechtan Scean, who held a ford against all comers, and boasted that they had slain as many Ulstermen as there were alive at that day. He also performed some wonderful feats of hunting on the same occasion, and returned with his spoils to Emain Macha.<sup>1</sup>

It was on his return that he first exhibited one of his miraculous qualities, the heat that came upon him in battle. To cool him off, his friends were forced, upon this and other occasions, to plunge him into three vats of water successively. When put into the first, he caused it to boil over; after he had been in the second, no man could bear the heat of it; after he had been in the third, it had but a moderate heat. In this connection may be cited an incident in the *Táin bó Cuailgne*, when one of Medb's warriors was sent out, one morning, to treat with Cuchulainn.

In the night . . . there was a great fall of snow, whereby the five provinces at large were reduced to one dead level. Cuchullin discarded the twenty-seven cunningly prepared under-shirts which with cords and ropes were secured about him; and this he did to escape the difficulty that would arise in throwing them off, should his paroxysm come to the boiling point and he in them still. Anon, and for thirty feet all round his body, the snow melted with the intense heat generated in the hero's system; his charioteer, indeed, durst not come nigh him.<sup>2</sup>

We are given many instances of Cuchulainn's unusual strength and dexterity in other activities than fighting. For example:

Cuchullin enters a wood, and there cuts a forked pole of four prongs, using but one sweep [of his sword] in the operation, *i. e.*, to lop it both top and bottom. . . . Then out of the chariot's after-part and from the finger-tips of one hand he hurls it so as to make it penetrate the ground up to two-thirds of its length.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, pp. 145ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131.

Again, when he wishes to make some chariot-poles, "Cuchullin goes to work and by the simple process of drawing the poles through the interstices both of his toes and of his fingers, finishes them to perfect straightness and smoothness, all bark and protuberances cleaned away."<sup>1</sup>

Of his might and fury in battle there are many examples: it will suffice to quote a few passages from the *Táin bó Cuailgne* descriptive of his combat with Ferdia.

Each of them continued to thrust at, and to pierce through, and to redden and to tear the body of the other from the dawn of the morning until the ninth hour of the evening; and if it had been the custom of birds in their flight to pass through the bodies of men, they could have passed through the bodies of those warriors that day.<sup>2</sup>

Up sprang Cuchulainn swift as the wind; quick as the swallow; fiery as the dragon; powerful as the lion; and he bounded into the air for the third time into the troubled clouds of it, until he lit upon the boss of the shield of Ferdia.<sup>3</sup>

And so closely did they fight that they cast the river from its course, so that there might have been a couch fit for a king and a queen to lie in, there in the midst of the ford, for there was no drop of water left in it, except such as fell therein from off those two heroes and champions as they trampled and hewed at each other in the midst of the ford.<sup>4</sup>

Cuchulainn, too, had wonderful powers of endurance. When Ulster was invaded by the forces of Medb and Ailill, the Ulstermen being at that time incapacitated by one of their periodical fits of debility, he alone defended his country. It is related that "from the Monday immediately before *Samhain* [October 31] to the Wednesday next after the feast of Bridget [February 1] . . . saving only a brief snatch at mid-day, he never slept."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 171.

Physical strength is not so marked a characteristic of the Welsh heroes of the *Mabinogion*. These stories deal less with the exploits of the heroes and more with the marvelous events that befall them. However, we have some passages descriptive of combats, though these are much briefer than similar passages in *Beowulf* or the Ulster cycle. Pwyll, prince of Dyved, fights with Havgan in the place of Arawn, king of Annwvyn.

Thereupon the two kings approached each other in the middle of the Ford and encountered, and at the first thrust, the man who was in the stead of Arawn struck Havgan on the center of the boss of his shield, so that it was cloven in twain, and his armour was broken, and Havgan himself was borne to the ground an arm's and a spear's length over the crupper of his horse, and received a deadly blow.'

Lludd, king of Britain, encountered the giant who had oppressed his kingdom: "And a fierce encounter was between them, so that the glittering fire flew from their arms. And at the last Lludd grappled with him and fate bestowed the victory upon Lludd."

In the old Welsh poetry, much of which was composed in celebration of the valiant deeds of heroes, battle-prowess bears a more prominent part. In a tribute to Cai (Kay) we read

Vanity were the foremost men

Compared with Cai in battle.

The sword in battle

Was unerring in his hand.

\* \* \* \* \*

Heavy was his vengeance,

Severe his advance.

When he drank from the horn,

He would drink with four.

To battle he would come

By the hundred he would slaughter;

There was no day that would satisfy him.'

<sup>1</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 263.

In a poem in praise of Geraint, son of Erbin, occurs the following passage:

In Llongborth I saw the rage of slaughter,  
And biers beyond all number,  
And red-stained men from the assault of Geraint.

In Llongborth I saw the edges of blades in contact,  
Men in terror, and blood on the pate,  
Before Geraint, the great son of his father.<sup>1</sup>

Marvelous physical endowments play a smaller part in the descriptions of the Welsh heroes than in those of Cuchulainn, but we have some instances. Of Bendigeid Vran it is related that there was no ship which could contain him, so that he was forced to wade across to Ireland on his great expedition to avenge his sister Branwen.<sup>2</sup> When they came to the river Linon, there was no bridge over it, and because of a lodestone in the bottom of the river, no ship could cross it. The army asked Bendigeid Vran for counsel. " 'There is none,' said he, 'except that he who will be chief, let him be a bridge. I will be so.' . . . And when he had lain down across the river, hurdles were placed upon him, and the host passed over thereby."<sup>3</sup> But, except for such brief and incidental mention, Bendigeid Vran's remarkable stature is not alluded to in the course of the story.

Skill of another sort than Cuchulainn's wonderful "feats" and Beowulf's "ocean-endurance" is sometimes emphasized in the *Mabinogion*. In the *mabinogi* of *Manawyddan, the Son of Llyr*, when the country of Manawyddan and Pryderi was desolated by magic, and they were compelled to seek their living in Lloegyr (England), they took first to making saddles. So superior was their craft that "as long as that workmanship could be had of Manawyddan, neither saddle nor housing was bought of a saddler throughout all Hereford; till at length every one of the saddlers perceived that they were losing much of their gain, and that no

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

man bought of them, but him who could not get what he sought from Manawyddan." Through jealousy they were driven out, and went to another town, where they took up the trade of shield-making. Here again their pre-eminence brought them undesirable attention from their rivals in trade, and they were forced to leave. In a third town they supported themselves by making shoes, with the same results as before. Gwydion ap Don also showed skill as a shoemaker.\* This is a sort of ability which is rare, to say the least, among the primitive heroes with whom we are dealing.

Though the pages of the *Morte Darthur* abound in descriptions of personal contests, and of the skill of knights, there are few instances in which King Arthur himself engages in such encounters. Most of these are in the early days of his reign, when he had not yet established himself supreme.

When he was besieged by the kings of Britain, he sallied forth and bore himself so well that even his enemies admired him: "And alweyes Kyng Arthur on horsback leyd on with a swerd and dyd merueillous dedes of armes that many of the kynges had grete ioye of his dedes and hardynesse/" When, later, these kings with their army came against him, he distinguished himself further, as a few passages will show:

Thenne Arthur as a lyon ranne vnto kyng Cradelmont of North-walys/ and smote him thorowe the lyfte syde that the hors and kyng fylle doune/. . . . thenne syre Arthur dyd so merueillously in armes that all men had wondyr/. . . . and when kyng Arthur sawe the kyng ryde on syr Ectors hors he was wroth and with his swerd he smote the kyng on the helme/ that a quarter of the helme and shelde fyll doune/ and so the swerd carf doune vnto the hors neck/ and so the kyng & the hors fyll doune to the ground/. . . . And as Arthur loked by him he sawe a knyght that was passingly wel horsed/ and therwith syre Arthur ranne to hym and smote hym on the helme that his swerd went vnto his teeth/ and the knyght sanke doune to the erthe dede/

\**Mabinogion*, p. 51.

\*Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, edit. Sommer (1889) I, p. 46.

\**Ibid.*, I, p. 54.

\**Ibid.*, I, p. 55.

\**Ibid.*, p. 71.

\**Ibid.*, I, p. 55.

\**Ibid.*, I, p. 58.

In Arthur's not altogether glorious adventure with the knight of the fountain, we have a description of a typical chivalrous combat.

Anon he toke his hors & dressid his shyld & toke a spere & they met so hard either in others sheldes that al to sheuered their speres/ ther with anone Arthur pulled out his swerd/ nay not so said the knyght/ it is fayrer sayd the knygt that we tweyne renne more to gyders with sharp sperys/ I wille wel said Arthur and I had any mo sperys/ I haue ynow said the knygt/ so ther cam a squyer and brougt in good sperys/ and Arthur chose one & he another/ so they spored their horses & cam to gyders with al the myghtes that eyther brak her speres to her hands/ thenne Arthur sette hand on his swerd/ nay said the knyght/ ye shal do better/ ye are a passyngé good luster as euer I mette with al/ & ones for the loue of the highe ordre of knyghthode lete vs Iuste ones agayn/ I assent me said Arthur/ anone there were brought two grete sperys/ and eury knyght gat a spere/ and therwith they ranne to gyders that Arthurs spere al to sheuered/ But the other knyghte hyt hym so hard in middes of the shelde/ that horse & man felle to the erthe/ and ther with Arthur was egre & pulled oute his swerd/ and said I will assay the syr knyghte on foote/ for I haue lost the honour on horsbak/ I will be on horsbak said the the knyght/ thenne was Arthur wrothe and dressid his sheld toward hym with his swerd drawn/ whan the knyghte sawe that/ he a lyghte/ for hym thought no worship to haue a knyght at suche auaille he to be on horsbak and he on foot and so he alyght & dressid his sheld vnto Arthur & ther begā a strong bataille with many grete strokes/ & soo hewe with her swerdes that the cantels flewe in the feldes/ and moche blood they bledde bothe/ that al the place there as they faught was ouer bledde with blood/ and thus they fought long and rested hem/ and thenne they went to the batayl agayne/ and so hurtled to gyders that both her swerdys met euen to gyders/ But the swerd of the knyghte smote kyng arthurs swerd in two pyeces/ wherfor he was heuy/<sup>1</sup>

In this combat, Arthur came off but second best. The same happens again in the tenth book, where Arthur is several times overthrown both by Sir Tristram and by Sir Palomides.<sup>2</sup> He acquits himself more creditably, however, when he encounters the giant at Saint Michael's Mount.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, pp. 412, 541, 554.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 168.

If we compare the ideals set forth above, some of the temperamental differences of the peoples who gave them birth are at once apparent. In *Beowulf* we have best exemplified the ideal of sheer strength and endurance; in *Cuchulainn* we have extraordinary strength, combined with skill of extraordinary kinds. He is not only a strong man, he is a wonderful acrobat, hanging by his toes on the edge of a cliff,<sup>1</sup> and leaping marvelous leaps across the country. The fantastic imagination of the Gael has been given free play in the descriptions of his remarkable feats. While the Welsh stories also display a lively fancy, they are not so much inclined to attribute marvelous physical powers to their heroes. Even the hyperbole of the Welsh poetry is not like the strange and often ludicrous exaggeration of the Irish romances.

So far the ideals presented are all primitive; in Arthur we find the ideal of a more civilized people. While he was ranked among the greatest in physical prowess, he was not uniformly successful, and cannot be acclaimed as an equal of the peerless knight, Sir Launcelot, of whom no defeat is ever recorded. And the very fact that his supremacy is not physical shows that he must owe his pre-eminence to qualities of some other sort, and that these, whatever they are, are more highly esteemed than mere physical powers. Defeat, unless by treachery, would be fatal to the estimation of a hero among primitive peoples; but Arthur, though supine beneath the sword of Pellinore, remained a hero to mediaeval England.

7. The appearance of a hero is a point to which we are accustomed to pay a great deal of attention. In earlier times this was not always the case, and indeed the reverse is common in traditional literature. In the whole of *Beowulf* we find no description of the hero: there is not so much as a descriptive epithet. "Hardy under helm" is the conventional epithet for a warrior, "giver of rings," or "people's protector," for a ruler. Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors were

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<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 79.

more interested in a man's deeds than in his appearance. There is but one passage which has any descriptive force, and it scarcely would serve as an identification. This is the speech of Hrothgar's lookout when he greets the Geats on their landing:

"A greater ne'er saw I  
of warriors in world than is one of you,—  
yon hero in harness! No henchman he,  
worthied by weapons, if witness his features,  
his peerless presence!"

Far otherwise is it when we come to Cuchulainn. The fantastic imagination of the Irish dwells lovingly upon the person of their hero and gives us long and detailed descriptions of him. These recur in several stories and are generally substantially the same. I quote from the *Táin bó Cuailgne*:

A handsome lad truly he was. Three sets of hair he had: next to the skin of his head, brown; in the middle, crimson; that which covered him on the outside formed as it were a diadem of gold, seeing that comparable to yellow gold was each glittering long curling splendid beauty-colored thread of the same, as free and loose it fell down and hung betwixt his shoulders. About his neck were a hundred linklets of red gold that flashed again, with pendants hanging from them. His headgear was adorned with a hundred mixed carbuncle jewels, strung. On either cheek four moles he had: a yellow, a green, a blue, a red. In either eye seven pupils, as it were seven sparkling gems. Either foot of the twain was garnished with seven toes; both this hand and that, with as many fingers; each one of which was endowed with clutch of a hawk's talon, with grip of a hedgehog's claw. He dons his gorgeous raiment that he wore in great conventions: a fair crimson tunic of five plies and fringed, with a long pin of white silver, gold-enchased and patterned, shining as it had been a luminous torch which for its blazing property men might not endure to see. Next to his skin, a body-vest of silk bordered and fringed all round with gold, with silver, and with white bronze; which vest came as far as the upper edge of his russet-coloured kilt. A trusty special shield, in hue dark-crimson, and its circumference armed with a pure silver rim. At his left side, a long and golden-hilted sword. Beside him in the chariot, a lengthy spear; together with a keen 'aggression-boding' javelin, fitted with 'hurling' thong, with rivets of white bronze. In one hand he carried nine heads, nine also in the other; the which in token of valor and of skill in arms he held at arm's length, and in sight of all the army shook.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 247-251.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 178.



Such appeared Cuchulainn, when he desired to make a favorable impression upon the maidens of the opposing host. But in the fury of battle he presented a different aspect:

All over him, from his crown to the ground, his flesh and every limb and joint and point and articulation of him quivered as does a tree, yea, a bulrush, in mid-current. Within his skin he put forth an unnatural effort of his body: his feet, his shins, and his knees shifted themselves and were behind him; his heels and calves and hams were displaced to the front of his leg-bones, in condition such that their knotted muscles stood up in lumps large as the clenched fist of a fighting man. The frontal sinews of his head were dragged to the back of his neck, where they showed in lumps bigger than the head of a manchild of one month. Then his face underwent an extraordinary transformation: one eye became engulfed in his head so far that 'tis a question whether a wild heron could have got at it where it lay against his occiput, to drag it out upon his cheek; the other eye on the contrary protruded suddenly, and of itself so rested upon his cheek. His mouth was twisted awry till it met his ears. His lion's gnashings caused flakes of fire, each one larger than fleece of three-year-old wether, to stream from his throat into his mouth and so outwards. The sounding blows of the heart that panted within him were as the howl of a ban-dog doing his office, or of a lion in the act of charging bears. Among the aerial clouds over his head were visible the virulent pouring showers and sparks of ruddy fire which the seething of his savage wrath caused to mount up above him. His hair became entangled above his head as it had been branches of red thorn-bush stuffed into a strongly fenced gap to block it; over the which though a prime apple tree had been shaken, yet may we surmise that never an apple of them would have reached the ground, but rather that all would have been held impaled, each on an individual hair as it bristled on him for fury. His 'hero's paroxysm' projected itself out of his forehead, and showed larger than the whetstone of a first-rate man-at-arms. Taller, thicker, more rigid, longer than mast of a great ship was the perpendicular jet of dusky blood which out of his scalp's very central point shot upwards and then was scattered to the four cardinal points; whereby was formed a magic mist of gloom resembling the smoky pall that drapes a regal dwelling, what time a king at night-fall of a winter's day draws near to it.<sup>1</sup>

One does not wonder at being told that "not by any means did he plume himself upon the horrid magic-wrought disguise," in which he appeared when the wrath of battle came upon him.

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<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 175.

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 178.

In the Welsh material we find few such detailed descriptions. There is an occasional descriptive epithet in the poetry,—for example, “Cai the fair.” In the *Mabinogion* we are told of Pryderi, the son of Pwyll, that “the name which they gave him was Gwri Wallt Euryn, because what hair was upon his head was as yellow as gold.” The description of Kilhwch in *Kilhwch and Olwen* is comparable to those in the *Cuchullin Saga*.

And the youth pricked forth upon a steed with head dappled grey, of four winters old, firm of limb, with shell-formed hoofs, having a bridle of linked gold on his head, and upon him a saddle of costly gold. And in the youth's hand were two spears of silver, sharp, well-tempered, headed with steel, three ells in length, of an edge to wound the wind and cause blood to flow, and swifter than the fall of the dew-drop from the blade of reed-grass upon the earth when the dew of June is at the heaviest. A gold-hilted sword was upon his thigh, the blade of which was of gold, bearing a cross of inlaid gold of the hue of the lightning of heaven: his war-horn was of ivory. Before him were two white-breasted greyhounds, having strong collars of rubies about their necks, reaching from the shoulder to the ear. And the one that was on the left side bounded across to the right side, and the one on the right to the left, and like two sea-swallows sported around him. And his courser cast up four sods with his four hoofs, like four swallows in the air, now above, now below. About him was a four-cornered cloth of purple, and an apple of gold was at each corner, and every one of the apples was of the value of an hundred kine. And there was precious gold of the value of three hundred kine upon his shoes, and upon his stirrups, from his knees to the tip of his toe. And the blade of grass bent not beneath him so light was his courser's tread as he journeyed toward the gate of Arthur's Palace.<sup>1</sup>

This is a description rather of the hero's equipment than of his personal appearance. But even so, it bears a close relation to the Cuchulainn descriptions. There is more than a hint of the fantastic quality which is so noticeable in those; there is even a rather absurd paradox in the horse's casting up sods with his hoofs while he trod so lightly as not to bend a blade of grass.

<sup>1</sup>Skene. *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

In all the books of the *Morte Darthur*, there is not a sentence descriptive of the hero. Nor is Malory any more graphic in dealing with his other characters. None of them is described save in the most general terms. Either it is taken for granted that the reader would be able to supply his own mental picture of Arthur, Guenevere, and Launcelot, or else the appearance of the character, as in *Beowulf*, was considered as being of very minor importance. The Celtic imagination, and more especially the Gaelic, pleased itself with attributing fantastic and unusual appearances, as well as miraculous physical powers, to its heroes. The Teutonic, being more matter-of-fact, more practical, subordinated appearance to actions, and in this respect the Teutonic spirit would seem to have toned down the Celtic legends of Arthur, before, in Malory's work, they received their final shaping.

### III

#### PERSONAL VIRTUES

8. The personal virtues of a hero, courage, honor, friendship, and the like, are of the highest importance as illuminating the character of the people to whom he belongs. Conceptions of the virtues differ greatly in different ages and civilizations; the same word does not always mean the same thing. There is no surer index of men's true ideals than the actions which they attribute to their popular heroes.

9. Of the personal virtues of the heroes of primitive story, courage is always a prominent one. In *Beowulf* it is strikingly exhibited. He comes over the sea to fight the dreaded monster, Grendel, and tells Hrothgar of his resolve:

"That I would work the will of your people  
fully, or fighting fall in death,  
in fiend's gripe fast. I am firm to do  
an earl's brave deed, or end the days  
of this life of mine in the mead-hall here."

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<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 634-638.

In the combat with Grendel's dam, where he seems more in danger of defeat than in his previous fight with Grendel, his courage is tried, but not found wanting:

Firm still stood, nor failed in valor,  
heedful of high deeds, Hygelac's kinsman;  
flung away sword, featly jewelled,  
the angry earl; on earth it lay  
steel-edged and stiff. His strength he trusted,  
hand-gripe of might. So man shall do  
whenever in war he weens to earn him  
lasting fame, nor fears for his life!<sup>1</sup>

His valor was acclaimed by the grateful Danes:

Then Beowulf's glory  
eager they echoed, and all averred  
that from sea to sea, or south or north,  
there was no other in earth's domain,  
under vault of heaven more valiant found  
of warriors none more worthy to rule!<sup>2</sup>

In old age, when he went out to fight the dragon that devastated his kingdom, he refused the help of his thanes, his valiant spirit disdaining aid in the struggle:

"—Now abide by the barrow, ye breast-plate mailed,  
ye heroes in harness, which of us twain  
better from battle rush bear his wounds.  
Wait ye the finish. The fight is not yours,  
nor meet for any but me alone  
to measure might with this monster here  
and play the hero. Hardily I  
shall win that wealth, or war shall seize,  
cruel killing, your king and lord!"

As may be expected, Cuchulainn's daring is extraordinary, to match his extraordinary powers. In the *Sick-Beo of Cuchulainn* he confronts the army of Eochaid Juil and Senach the Unearthly alone, sending away Labraid, in whose

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 1529-1536.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 856-861.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2529-2537.

behalf he is fighting, and defeats the host single-handed.' At the siege of Howth he refuses when urged to close his gap in the wall with a fence. "'Not so,' said Cuchulainn, 'a spear of iron closes it for me.'"

His courage is not mere confidence in his superhuman powers. In the *Feast of Bricriu*, when the heroes of Ireland contend for supremacy, the giant Terrible offers to settle the question. He proposes a bargain with any of them who shall choose to accept it: the champion is to cut off the giant's head today, and in return to allow the giant to cut off his tomorrow. None of them dares but Cuchulainn, who, on assurance that he shall be awarded without question the championship of Ireland, agrees to the trial, and decapitates the giant. The latter, nothing discommoded, picks up his head and goes off. The next day he returns with his head as solid on his shoulders as ever, demanding fulfillment of his bargain. Cuchulainn submits cheerfully, and "the other three times lowers the ax on the neck and the back of the hero. 'Rise, Cuchulainn,' he says, 'to thee the royalty of the warriors of Ireland, and the portion of the hero, none can contest it with thee.'"<sup>3</sup> This trial evidently required a higher sort of courage than his daring in battle, for invulnerability was not among Cuchulainn's marvelous attributes. Here all his wonderful strength and skill could avail him nothing.<sup>4</sup>

His moral courage is nowhere better shown than in his calm acceptance of fate when he goes to his last battle. "'Loath as ye be to dismiss me into danger and against my

<sup>1</sup> Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, V, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> The incident of the challenge to exchange blows is found elsewhere in mediaeval literature, the best-known instance being that of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, of which romance it forms the principal incident. However, the story as told in the *Fled Bricrend* antedates all other forms. For a full discussion, see G. L. Kittredge, *A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight*, Cambridge, 1916.

foes, there to encounter death and dissolution,' ” he says to Cathbad, “ ‘even so cheerful am I that now go to have my side bored and my body mangled: neither knowest thou better than myself that in this onslaught I must fall.’ ”

Specific instances of courage are not common in the *Mabinogion*. It is true that there are a great many combats, but these are seldom dealt with in detail. No doubt Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, may be said to show courage when he undertakes to fight Havgan in the stead of Arawn.<sup>2</sup> There is a good deal of fighting in *Kilhwch and Olwen*, especially in the pursuit of *Twrch Trwyth*. This is not a successful enterprise at first, as he turns and harries the country of the pursuers. When he approaches Cornwall, Arthur says: “ ‘Twrch Trwyth has slain many of my men, but, by the valour of warriors, while I live he shall not go into Cornwall. And I will not follow him any longer, but I will oppose him life to life. Do ye as ye will!’ ” So, by Arthur’s courage and resolution, the boar is overcome.

Courageous utterances are put in the mouth of Gwen, son of Llywarch Hen:

I will not lose thy countenance, prone to warfare,  
From the time that the hero puts on harness for the  
course;

I will hear<sup>4</sup> the pang ere I quit the spot.  
\* \* \* \* \*

The streams will divide around the wall of the Caer,  
And I will prognosticate—

A shield with a fractured front before I skulk.  
\* \* \* \* \*

For the terror of death from the base men of Lloegyr  
I will not tarnish my honour;  
I will not dispraise maidens.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup>The Arthur of *Kilhwch and Olwen* is a purely Welsh hero, the story being free from French or English influence.

<sup>3</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup>*Sic*; query, ‘bear’?

<sup>5</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 330.

Further on in the same poem, Llywarch Hen, lamenting for his sons, praises their valor.

Nor Pyll nor Madawg would be long lived,  
 If they preserved the custom.  
 Would they surrender? They would not surrender! They  
 would never ask for truce!<sup>1</sup>

Courage is a prominent characteristic of the chivalric ideal. The knight would die any death rather than accept dishonor. It was not, however, necessarily dishonor to yield to a stronger knight, unless the combat were avowedly *à l'outrance*. But if the victor were so uncourteous as to demand that the other yield himself "recreaunt," the brave knight would refuse, though on pain of death. Thus Arthur to Sir Accolon, when the latter, by Morgan le Fay's treachery, had overcome him:

Nay sayd Arthur I maye not so/ for I haue promysed to doo  
 the bataille to the vttermest by the feythe of my body whyle me  
 lasteth the lyf/ and therfor I had leuer to dye with honour than to lyue  
 with shame/ And yf it were possyble for me to dye an C tymes I  
 had leuer to dye so ofte/ than yeeld me to the/ for though I lacke  
 wepen/ I shalle lacke no worship/ and yf thow slee me wepenles that  
 shalle be thy shame/

The courage of Beowulf is of a stoical quality; it is born of the feeling, so prevalent in Anglo-Saxon literature, that *Wyrd* (Fate) rules all, and appoints each man the hour of his death, that it is useless, therefore, to attempt to prolong life beyond its allotted span, but that to die gloriously is worth every man's endeavor. A sincere fatalism can know no fear of death, and the worship of glory is a powerful inciter to deeds of conspicuous valor. To set free a people from the oppression of a monster, to be hailed as a heroic deliverer, are ends worth the braving of great odds in strength, especially if a man feels that he cannot be

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p.131.

overcome before the time appointed. Such was Beowulf's reasoning, conscious or unconscious. Though he sought glory, he sought it not in the spirit of bravado, save in his youthful swimming exploit with Breca. At no other time did he seek danger for danger's sake merely.

Otherwise was it with Cuchulainn. His adventures are almost all, like his first with Nechtan Scean's sons, undertaken from the love of adventure, rather than in championship of the oppressed or in defense of his people. It is true that he undertook, single-handed, to stand off the army of the men of Erin, but he compounded with them thus: they were to send each morning a warrior to meet him, and for so long a time as he was killing the warrior the host might move forward.' If he had continued his earlier tactics of killing as many as he could each day, he might have terrorized them and driven them away much sooner, but he preferred the greater glory that would accrue to him from these combats with picked champions. He actually sacrificed his country's greater welfare to his personal reputation. He always wanted to fight: the more fighting he could get the better. He would have made a poor ruler, for he could never have been content with peace and would always have dragged his people into quarrels. His ideal existence, one imagines, would be paralleled by a modern Irishman's "Donnybrook fair."

But courage of a more passive sort he had, though it was seldom called into play. It was not the battle-lust which could face without a tremor the ax of the giant Terrible, though it might have been that which nerved him to go forth eagerly to the conflict which he knew to be his last. For the sake of his posthumous fame, he was willing to submit to what seemed unavoidable death, and stretch forth his neck unflinchingly for the blow. One imagines that Beowulf would scarcely have made this sort of a bargain merely for the honor to be gained: he probably would have agreed with the heroes who prudently said that they did not know

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<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p.160.



whether or not the giant could survive decapitation, but they were very certain that *they* could not.

The ardor for combat which was so strong in the Irish seems not to have extended in the same degree to the Cymric Celts, or else to have been softened somewhat. At any rate it does not find much expression in their prose tales or in their poetry. We have it most clearly shown in the lines about Cai, previously quoted:

To the battle he would come  
By the hundred he would slaughter;  
There was no day that would satisfy him.

But such blood-thirstiness is rare. The Welsh heroes are brave as a matter of course, but they do not go out of their way to seek combats, nor are these dwelt upon particularly. Their courage is of the serviceable sort that can be put in the pocket when not in use, and need not be constantly thrust upon the attention.

It may be that the *Mabinogion* represent a class of Welsh folk-tales more peaceably inclined than the Arthurian stories; at any rate fighting plays a more important part in the latter, as we find them in mediaeval English and Continental versions. But still the courage of the Arthurian heroes is not of so self-assertive a type as that of the Irish. The knight usually sets out at the command of the king, to rescue a distressed lady or for some similar end. While Malory relates many a combat between knights who meet by chance, the victor is usually content with overthrowing his foe, and does not seek to slay him: it is love of skill that animates the contestants rather than love of bloodshed.

Arthur himself seldom fights save in good cause.—for the safety of his kingdom, for the recovery of his wife, for the avenging of a lady piteously slain. But he fears not to risk his life when necessary, and, as we have seen above, chooses death in preference to yielding, when yielding means dishonor according to the knightly code. His courage, both

moral and physical, is never for one moment called in question. Though not so great in prowess as some of his knights, he is second to none in valor.

10. Personal honor is always an important characteristic of a hero. There is, however, probably no other virtue of which the conception is so various among different peoples. Perhaps its most universal meaning among the more primitive is that of fidelity to a pledge. This often leads to actions which to our modern minds seem dishonorable, as when Pwyll yields Rhiannon to Gwawl. No examples of this sort are to be found in Teutonic legend, however, though they are common among the Celts. <sup>See also the</sup>

It is rather surprising, in view of the practicality which he usually displays, to find Beowulf taking into consideration a point of honor which does not usually appeal to the primitive mind, nor, indeed, to the modern civilized mind, but would be supposed to be almost the exclusive property of mediaeval chivalry. He refuses to possess an advantage over Grendel.

"More I hear, that the monster dire  
in his wanton mood, of weapons recks not;  
hence shall I scorn—so Hygelac stay,  
king of my kindred, kind to me!—  
brand or buckler to bear in the fight,  
gold-colored targe: but with gripe alone  
must I front the fiend and fight for life  
foe against foe!"

Cuchulainn shows no such fantastic generosity, for he never scruples to use the *gae-bulga*, a weapon of mysterious properties, apparently magical, against enemies who are without such means of offense. It was with this that he slew Ferdia<sup>1</sup> and Conlaoch<sup>2</sup>, who were each a match for him otherwise.

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 433-440.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup>D' Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, V, p. 52.

He does, however, illustrate the over-scrupulous fidelity to a pledge. In the beginning of the *Táin bó Cuailgne*, when his reputed father, Sualtach, brings him the news of the invasion of Ulster by the army of Medb and Ailill, Cuchulainn sends him to Emain Macha to tell the news to Conachar. Sualtach asks what he will do meanwhile, and he replies that he has an assignation that night at Tara with a handmaid of Fiedelm *nochruthlach*. "Sualtach objecting that this is a pitiful errand on which to go, at the price of abandoning Ulster to be trampled underfoot of enemies and outlanders, Cuchullin persists that go he must; 'otherwise,' says he, 'men's compacts will be falsified and women's words be verified.'"<sup>1</sup> This would seem to be rather a costly vindication of the honor of the lordly sex!

In *The Death of the Sons of Usnach*, Conachar, having resolved to avenge himself upon Naisi and his brethren, asks each of three different warriors what he would do if they should be destroyed while under his safeguard. Conall, the first approached, declares that he would slay every Ulsterman who should do them harm. Cuchulainn, who is next questioned, replies: "I pledge my word I would not take the greatest bribe of the globe from thee, though it be sought eastward as far as India itself, in lieu of thy head to fall for that deed."<sup>2</sup> It is Fergus who finally undertakes to bring them to Ulster.

In the *Táin*, Cuchulainn meets in the wood the chariot-eer of Medb's son cutting chariot-poles, and aids him in his task. When he tells him his name, "the driver exclaims that he is but a dead man; Cuchullin however comforts him with the assurance that he slays not drivers, nor messengers, nor the unweaponed."<sup>3</sup>

A scruple of honor is the means of bringing about Cuchulainn's death. A satirist asks him for his spear, threatening to revile him if he give it not. Cuchulainn replies that

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

he has never been reviled for his niggardliness, and throws it point first at the satirist, so that it kills him and nine others. Lugaid gets the spear and flings it at Cuchulainn, but misses him, killing Laegh, his charioteer. A little later on, Cuchulainn is again accosted by a satirist with the same request, and the same threat if he refuse.

"I am not bound to grant more than one request in one day; and moreover, I have already saved my honour by payment."

"Then I will revile Ulster for thy default," says the satirist.

"Never yet hath Ulster been reviled on account of any refusal or churlishness of mine. Though little of life remain to me, Ulster shall not be reviled this day."

He casts the spear with the same result as before, and this time one of his horses, the Gray of Macha, is slain by it. When a third satirist accosts him, he refuses twice, saying that he has paid for the honor of Ulster, but complies when the satirist says " 'I will then revile thy race,' " answering " 'Tidings that I have been defamed shall not go back to the land to which I myself shall never return; for little of my life remains to me.' " And so he casts his spear a third time, slaying the satirist and thrice nine men, and Lugaid returns it, dealing him his death-wound.

A common theme in Celtic legend is the loss of a wife through a rash pledge to grant whatever may be asked. It is so that Mongan loses Dubh-Lacha to the king of Leinster.<sup>1</sup> In the *Mabinogi* of Pwyll, *Prince of Dyved*, Gwawl comes to Pwyll's wedding and "craves a boon." Pwyll grants it, and it proves to be his bride, Rhiannon, that is desired.<sup>2</sup> One is inclined to sympathize with Rhiannon when she tells him, "Never did man make worse use of his wits than thou hast done."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, Kuno, and Nutt, Alfred, *The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal*, (1895), I, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 22.

Arthur is not so rash, for in granting a boon to Kilhwch he makes exceptions,—“save only my ship; and my mantle; and Caledwylch, my sword; and Rhongomyant, my lance; and Wynebgwethucher, my shield; and Carnwenhau, my dagger; and Gwenhwyvar, my wife.’” But, even so, he is at considerable trouble and danger in obtaining for Kilhwch Olwen the daughter of Yspadadden Penkawr, as he desires. The pledge is finally redeemed, however.

In the *Morte Darthur*, Arthur behaves honorably to his foster-father, Sir Ector. When the latter has learned of Arthur's achieving the sword he hails him king and requests that he be his “good and gracious lord,” when he has been crowned.

Els were I to blame said arthur for ye are the man in the world that I am most be holdyng to/ & my good lady and moder your wyf that as well as her owne hath fostred me and kepte/ and yf euer hit be goddes will that I be kynge as ye say/ ye shall desyre of me what I may doo/ and I shall not faille yow/ god forbede I shold faille yow/

This pledge was sincerely made and liberally kept.

Arthur had many warnings of the falsehood of Guenevere and Launcelot, but he was too honorable to give them credence. King Mark sent him such a warning:

Whanne kyng Arthur vnderstood the letter/ he musyd of many thynges/ & thought on his systers wordes quene Morgan le fay that she had sayd betwixe quene gueneuer and sir Launcelot/ and in this thoughte he studyed a grete whyle/ Thenne he bethought hym ageyne how his syster was his owne enemy/ and that she hated the Quene and sir launcelot/ and soo he putte all that out of his thoughte/

There is in this passage only of those I have quoted a touch of the truest fineness. The quality of mind which refuses to think evil and puts aside suspicion is something that elevates its possessor far more than mere scrupulous fidelity to an oath or a bargain, or even a chivalrous refusal

<sup>1</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 457.

<sup>3</sup>*Malory, Morte Darthur*, I, p. 42.

to take advantage of an enemy. It is one of the noblest traits in the character of Arthur, as Malory paints him.

11. Loyalty and friendship are always important qualities in a hero. There is something in the love of friend for friend, or in the self-sacrificing devotion to a leader, that touches human sympathies deeply. The love of man and woman has not at all times held the important place among human affections that it holds today, but the love of comrades, or of follower for leader, has commanded universal esteem.

The love of equals seems not to have played an important part with the German peoples. Much more emphasis is laid upon the loyalty of warriors to their lords.<sup>1</sup> The relation of follower to leader was one of the most kindly affection, as many passages in their poetry bear witness. The cohesive force which maintained Germanic society, says Rolleston, was the sentiment of "personal fidelity to a chief, . . . . a sentiment rooted profoundly in the Teutonic nature, and one which has never been surpassed by any other human impulse as the source of heroic self-sacrifice."<sup>2</sup>

The friendly relation between Beowulf and his uncle, King Hygelac, is many times attested:

His nephew was ever  
by hardy Hygelac held full dear,  
and each kept watch o'er the other's weal.<sup>3</sup>

Beowulf recounts before his last battle how he repaid his kinsman's bounty and did him good service throughout his life:

"—For all that he gave me, my gleaming sword  
repaid him at war,—such power I wielded,—  
for lordly treasure: with land he entrusted me  
homestead and house. He had no need  
from Swedish realm, or from Spear-Dane folk,

<sup>1</sup>Gummere, *Germanic Origins*, (1892), p. 474.

<sup>2</sup>Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*, (1911), p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 2169-2171.

or from men of the Gyfths, to get him help,—  
 some warrior worse for wage to buy!  
 Ever I fought in the front of all,  
 sole to the fore.”

At his death he avenged him on his slayer:

Nor fared he thence to the Frisian king  
 with the booty back, and breast-adornments;  
 but, slain in struggle, that standard-bearer  
 fell, atheling brave.”

The ideal of personal loyalty to the chieftain is also shown in Wiglaf's speech to the warriors when they see Beowulf driven back by the dragon.

“I am far more fain that the fire should seize  
 along with my lord these limbs of mine!  
 Unsuiting it seems our shields to bear  
 homeward hence, save here we essay  
 to fell the foe and defend the life  
 of the Weder's lord.”

Such an ideal of loyalty seems to have been almost unknown among the Celts; indeed, it was the lack of this, or some other unifying principle, which was their chief political defect. Thus we do not find Cuchulainn displaying any such particular devotion to Conachar as Beowulf showed for Hygelac. The great friendship of the Ulster cycle was the friendship between Cuchulainn and his old fellow-pupil, Ferdia. One of the most affecting episodes of Irish story is the combat between these two champions, which resulted in the death of Ferdia.

During the *Táin*, while Cuchulainn was holding the ford against the warriors of Medb and Ailill, Ferdia was persuaded, by the offer of the hand of Finnabair, Medb's daughter, to go against him. Cuchulainn reproached him, re-

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 2490-2498.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2503-2506.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2651-2656.

minding him of their old friendship, when they were pupils of Scathach. "‘O my friend Ferdia,’ said Cuchulain, ‘it was not right for thee to have come to the combat and the fight with me, at the instigation of Ailill and Maeve.’”

He protests his unwillingness to fight with him:

“None put meat his lips between,  
 None to king or stainless queen  
 Yet was born whose praise I’d gain,  
 None whose scorn would win thy pain.  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 Clots of blood my faithful heart  
 Choke; my soul is like to part:  
 ’Tis with little force my arm  
 Strikes, to do Ferdia harm!”

He shares with him the medicaments that his fairy kin bring to him: “And of every soothing and salving herb and plant that was brought for the bruises, and the cuts, and the gashes, and all the wounds of Cuchulain, he used to send an equal portion westward across the ford to Ferdia.” Ferdia reciprocates by sending him a share of the delicacies brought him by the men of Erin.

In the end of the episode, when Cuchulainn has slain Ferdia by the *gae-bulga*, the only feat of his which Ferdia did not know, he laments him most bitterly:

“What availeth me triumph or boasting?  
 For, frantic with grief for my deed,  
 I am driven to mourn for the body  
 That my sword made so sorely to bleed.”

When Laegh, his charioteer, remonstrates with him, he replies:

<sup>1</sup>Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 146.



"I would mourn if my leg he had severed,  
 Had he hewn through this arm that remains,  
 That he mounts not his steeds; and for ever  
 In life, immortality gains."

And again, urged to arise, he says pathetically, "How shall I be the better for arising, O my servant! . . . now that he who lieth here hath fallen by me?"

The friendship of Pwyll and Arawn is made much of in the *Mabinogion*, "And thenceforth they made strong the friendship that was between them, and each sent unto the other horses, and greyhounds, and hawks, and all such jewels as they thought would be pleasing to each other."

After the death of Bendigeid Vran in Ireland, when his brother Manawyddan returns to Britain he finds that his cousin Caswallawn has usurped the realm and he is left landless. Pryderi, his friend, offers him the hand of his mother in marriage, and the rule of the seven Cantrevs of Dyved, which belong to him. "Heaven reward thee for thy friendship," says Manawyddan. "I would show thee the best friendship in the world if thou wouldst let me," replies Pryderi. "And such was the friendship between those four [Manawyddan, Rhiannon, Pryderi and his wife,] that they would not be parted from each other by night nor by day."

The laments of the Welsh bards for their lords are often full of a sense of personal loss which testifies to the friendly relations existing between them. In the lament for Urien Reged we find such lines as the following:

Woe to my hand that my lord is slain!

\* \* \* \* \*

My arm has not flagged; my bosom is greatly troubled;  
 Ah! My heart, is it not broken?

A head I bear that was my support.\*

\*Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 146.

\**Ibid.*, I, p. 145.

\**Ibid.*, p. 48.

\**Mabinogion*, p. 17.

\**Ibid.*, p. 49.

\*Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 357.

A similar note is struck in the lament for Cyndylan :

The Hall of Cyndylan pierces me  
 To see it without roof, without fire,  
 Dead is my chief, myself alive!  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 The Hall of Cyndylan is still  
 To-night, after losing its elder.  
 The great merciful God! what shall I do?"

The relation of Arthur and his knights seems to have been one of mutual esteem. His great personal reputation and the fame of his Round Table were the lodestones which drew knights from distant lands to his court. He required of them no oath of loyalty, but on the contrary one of the penalties for failure to obey the knightly code was " forfeiture of their worship and lordship of kyng Arthur for euermore."<sup>1</sup>

Much of the tragedy of the latter part of the *Morte Darthur* is in Arthur's sorrow for the destruction of his Round Table, and especially that dissension should have come between him and Launcelot.

Moche more I am soryer for my good knyghtes losse/ than for the losse of my fayre quene/ for quenes I myghte haue ynowe/ but such a felawshyp of good knyghtes shall neuer be to gyders in no company/ and now I dare say sayd Arthur there was neuer crysten kyng helde suche a felaushyp to gyders/ & allas that euer syr launcelot & I shold be at debate/<sup>2</sup>

And whan he herd of the deth of his noble knyghtes/ and in especyal of syr gaheris and sir Gareths deth/ thenne the kyng swounded for pure sorou And whan he awoke of his swoun/ thenne he sayd ¶Allas that euer I bare croun vpon my hede/ For now haue I loste the fayrest felaushyp of noble knyghtes that euer helde crysten kyng to gyders/ Allas my good knyghtes ben slayne aweye from me/ now within these two dayes I haue lost xl knyghtes/ & also the noble felaushyp of syr laūcelot and his blood/ for now I may neuer hold hem to gyders no more with my worshyp/ Allas that euer this werre beganne/<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 452.

<sup>2</sup>Malory, *Morte Dathur*, I, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 812.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 811.

There is an affecting scene where Arthur is fighting against Sir Launcelot, when the king is struck down by Sir Bors, who would have slain him. Launcelot prevents him and lifts the king again to his horse. "Thenne whan kyng Arthur was on horsbak/ he loked vpon syr launcelot/ & thene the teres brast out of his eyen/ thynkyng on the grete curtosy that was in syr laūcelot more than in any other man/""

When Launcelot, constrained by the Pope's mandate, restored Guenevere to her husband, Arthur had not much to say to him. But his few words are poignant with the grief of injured friendship. "Wel wel syr launcelot sayd the kyng/ I haue gyuen the no cause to do me as thou hast done/ For I haue worshypped the and thyn more than ony of alle my knyghtes/""

Arthur's heart seems to have broken at the death of Sir Gawain, mortally wounded in the battle at Dover when Mordred sought to stay the landing of the king.

Whan syr Arthur wyst that syre Gawayne was layd so lowe he wente vnto hym/ and there the kyng made sorowe oute of mesure/ and took sire Gawayne in his armes/ and thryes he there swounded/ And thenne when he awaked/ he sayd/ Allas sir Gawayne my systers sone/ here now thou lyggest the man in the world that I loued moost/ and now is my Ioye gone/ for now my neuewe syre Gawayne I will discover me vnto your persone/ in syr Launcelot & you I moost had my Ioye/ & my affyaunce/ & now haue I lost my Ioye of you bothe/ wherfor alle my erthely Ioye is gone from me/²

The tie of affection between the lord and his followers was a very strong one among the early Germanic peoples, as we have seen, and seems to have been almost equally firm among the Welsh. The Irish were more individualistic: they emphasize the tribal bond less strongly than the bond of personal friendship between equals. The most tragical incident in the Ulster cycle, if we except Cu-

¹Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 819.

²*Ibid.*, I, p. 823.

³*Ibid.*, I, p. 841.

chulainn's unwitting destruction of his own son Conlaoch, is his combat with Ferdia. The composers of the Irish tales felt keenly the bitterness of the fate that brought Ferdia, through his own weakness, to be pitted against his beloved comrade in arms.

With equal keenness Malory seems to have felt the tragedy of the destruction of Arthur's life work in the alienation from him of his greatest knight, with the consequent division of the Round Table. But he seems to have had no blame for Launcelot, whose sin against Arthur's friendship was the cause of this, but only for Mordred and Agravain, who stirred up the strife between them. The mediaeval code permitted Launcelot to maintain his guiltlessness unblushingly, but still the king's brief speech, designedly or not, conveys exquisitely the reproach of friendship wounded to the heart. And the value placed upon friendship is conclusively demonstrated by the fact that Arthur's grief is ever more for the loss of his knights and his friend than for the loss of his queen or the dishonor done himself.

12. Courtesy is an ideal which one does not, usually, associate with a primitive state of society. It is the more suprising, therefore, to note the dignified and gravely courteous manner of Beowulf. Unferth has lent him his sword, Hrunting, for the combat with the mother of Grendel. Though it has failed him in the hour of need, Beowulf tactfully praises it in returning it to its owner:

Bade then the hardy-one Hrunting be brought  
to the son of Ecglaef, the sword bade him take,  
excellent iron, and uttered his thanks for it,  
quoeth that he counted it keen in battle,  
'war-friend' winsome: with words he slandered not  
edge of the blade: 'twas a big-hearted man!

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*'Beowulf*, ll. 1807-1812.

Stately is his leave-taking of Hrothgar :

Lo we sea farers say our will,  
 far-come men, that we fain would seek  
 Hygelac now. We here have found  
 hosts to our heart: thou hast harbored us well.  
 If ever on earth I am able to win me  
 more of thy love, O lord of men,  
 aught anew, than I now have done,  
 for work of war I am ready still!  
 If it come to me ever across the seas  
 that neighbor foemen annoy and affright thee,—  
 as they that hate thee erewhile have used,—  
 thousands then of thanes shall I bring,  
 heroes to help thee.

\* \* \* \* \*

If thy Hrethric should come to the court of the Geats,  
 a sovran's son, he will surely there  
 find his friends.”<sup>1</sup>

This sincere and noble speech shows the “big-hearted” Teutonic warrior in one of his most favorable aspects.

Not much evidence of Cuchulainn's courtesy is to be found in the Ulster Cycle. What evidence there is, is largely negative. In the *Wooing of Emer*, when Cuchulainn arrives at the home of Scathach, her daughter Uathach serves him in the disguise of a serving-man. For no reason related by the story, he strikes her with such force as to break a finger, whereat she cries out so that all the household rush in. One of Scathach's soldiers attacks Cuchulainn, and is slain by him. Then, as in the boyhood episode of the hound of Culann, he offers his service in the stead of the man he has killed.<sup>2</sup> All things considered, this offer seems fair; and the whole incident hardly redounds to the credit of the hero.

Nor does he show much courtesy in the tale of the *Appearance of the Morrighu*. Meeting a woman riding in a chariot while a man walks beside her driving a cow, he stops them:

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 1818ff.

<sup>2</sup>D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, V, p. 44

"The cow is not pleased to be driven on by you," said Cuchullin. "She does not belong to you," said the woman; "the cow is not owned by any of your friends or associates." "The cows of Ulster belong to me," said Cuchullin. "You would give a decision about the cow!" said the woman; "you are taking too much upon yourself, O Cuchullin!" The cow was stolen. It is more a thing normally for a cow, it would be saying practically to take back.

Discomfited, apparently, he changes the subject: "'Why is it the woman who accosts me?' said Cuchullin. 'Why is it not the man?'" In this episode, Cuchulainn shows himself meddlesome and quarrelsome,—in fact anything but an ideally courteous hero.

Courtesy is, by contrast, a marked trait of the Welsh heroes. Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, being hunting, saw the stag he was following brought down by some strange dogs. He drove them off and set on his own. A little later he met the owner of the strange hounds. "'Greater discourtesy saw I never in man, than to drive away the dogs that were killing the stag and to set upon it thine own,'" said the stranger. "'O chieftain,' he replied, 'if I have done ill I will redeem thy friendship.'"

When Matholwch of Ireland came to sue for the hand of Branwen, daughter of Llyr, her half-brother offended him by mutilating his horses. Her brother, Bendigeid Vran, king of Britain, made handsome amends to his guest:

"Truly," said Bendigeid Vran, "there are no means by which we may prevent his going away at enmity with us, that we will not take. . . Tell him that he shall have a sound horse for every one that has been injured. And besides that, as an atonement for the insult, he shall have a staff of silver, as large and as tall as himself, and a plate of gold the breadth of his face. And show unto him who it was that did this, and that it was done against my will, but that he who did it is my brother by the mother's side, and therefore it would be hard for me to put him to death. And let him come and meet me," said he, "and we will make peace in any way he may desire."

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

The courtesy of Arthur in *Kilhmch and Olwen* is not surpassed even in the later romances. When Kilhwch comes to his court they exchange formal greetings:

"Greetings be unto thee, Sovereign Ruler of this Island; and be this greeting no less unto the lowest than unto the highest, and be it equally unto thy guests, and thy warriors, and thy chieftains—let all partake of it as completely as thyself. And complete be thy favour, and thy fame, and thy glory, throughout all this Island." "Greetings unto thee also," said Arthur; "sit thou between two of my warriors, and thou shalt have minstrels before thee, and thou shalt enjoy the privileges of a king born to a throne, as long as thou remainest here. And when I dispense my presents to the visitors and strangers in this court, they shall be in thy hand at my commencing."

That Malory's Arthur is ever courteous goes without saying. We find him well-mannered to his foster-brother, Sir Kay, when as boys they ride with Sir Ector to the jousts at London. "So as they rode to ye Iustes ward/ sir kay lost his swerd for he had left it at his faders lodgyng/ & so he prayd yong Arthur for to ride for his swerd/ I wyll wel said Arthur/ & rode fast after ye swerd/"

He greets kindly the kings who come to the tournament he has proclaimed:

And kyng Arthur was glad of their comynge/ for he wende that al the kynges & knyghtes had come for grete loue/ and to haue done hym worship at his feste/ wherfor the kyng made grete ioye/ and sente the kynges and knyghtes grete presentes/<sup>2</sup>

One likes this ingenuous young sovereign, and is sorry for the rebuff his courtesy receives.

It is a pleasant picture, too, that Malory gives of Arthur's courtesy to his father's friend in the battle with the eleven kings. He sees Sir Ulfius unhorsed and smites down king Cradlemont. "And thenne he tooke the hors

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<sup>1</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 44.

by the rayne/ and ladde hym vnto Vlfius & said haue this hors myn old frend/ for grete nede hast thow of hors.”

A chivalrous foe he was, also, for after the defeat and death of Lucius and his allies, he cared for their bodies and had them embalmed and sent back to Rome. “And them that were hurte he lete the surgyens doo serche their hurtes and woundes/ and commanded to spare no salues ne medecynes tyl they were hole.”

The courtesy of Beowulf shows a rather ponderous formality and stateliness. It seems to arise from a sense of what is fitting, the observation of ceremonial decencies. Such a conventionality is characteristic of the Teuton. His phlegmatic temperament imposes an inhibition upon rash action or speech; he ponders and then says his say with a slow gravity.

The quick-witted Celt, on the other hand, is deficient in this restraint. His temper flares up, he strikes without thinking; when his rage is over he makes what amends he can. The Gaelic temperament is more hasty and more violent than the Cymric, and we find Cuchulainn, in particular, revealing a meddlesome and quarrelsome disposition.

The later Welsh stories (for *Kilhwch and Olwen* is undoubtedly later than the *Mabinogion* proper) show a development in courtesy. The gracious greetings of Kilhwch and Arthur reveal much of the gentle demeanor that comes to its full flower in the mediaeval romances.

13. Liberality is a virtue that is always made much of in Anglo-Saxon poetry. “Giver of rings” was a favorite epithet for a king: his throne was the “gift-stool.” The bestowing of treasure was a part of the ceremonial of the feast. Beowulf is laden with valuable presents by Hrothgar and his queen when he leaves Heorot. He generously

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<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 174.



bestows one of these gifts upon the thane who has been watching the ship of the Geats:

A sword to the boat-guard Beowulf gave,  
mounted with gold; on the mead-bench since  
he was better esteemed, that blade possessing,  
heirloom old.<sup>1</sup>

When he reaches his home he bestows the greater part of them upon Hygelac.

“He made me gifts,  
Healfdene’s heir, for my own disposal.  
Now to thee, my prince, I proffer them all,  
gladly give them. Thy grace alone  
can find me favor.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Then he bade bear him the boar-head standard,  
the battle-helm high, and breast-plate gray,  
the splendid sword; then spake in form:—  
“Me this war-gear the wise old prince,  
Hrothgar gave,

\* \* \* \* \*

well hold thou it all!”

And I heard that soon passed over the path of this  
treasure,

all apple-fallow, four good steeds,  
each like the others; arms and horses  
he gave to the king.

\* \* \* \* \*

I heard, too, the necklace to Hygd he presented,  
wonder-wrought treasure, which Wealtheow gave him,  
sovrain’s daughter: three steeds he added,  
slender and saddle-gay.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, generosity was esteemed among the Irish, though we do not find the bestowal of treasure by the lord playing so large a part. We are not given many instances of Cuchulainn’s liberality, the only one that comes to mind being the bestowal of his spear at the request of the satirist.\*

“I have never yet been reviled because of my niggardliness  
It was the custom to grant gifts, and the first request was granted, the great necessity to the giver. At the first request was denied, the second must surely be granted.”

<sup>1</sup>Beowulf, ll. 1900-1903.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 2146 ff.

\*Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 258. See above, p. 33.

or my churlishness,'” says the hero, and flings his spear, though he knows it means his death. Nowhere else is this virtue particularly emphasized in Cuchulainn’s character.

The dealing of gifts at a feast was a notable custom among the Welsh,—almost as much as among the Anglo-Saxons. At Pwyll’s wedding-feast, we hear that “Pwyll arose, and he caused silence to be proclaimed, and desired all the suitors and the minstrels to show and to point out what gifts were to their wish and desire. And this being done, the feast went on, and he denied no one while it lasted.” Arthur speaks, in *Kilhwch and Olwen*, of “dispensing presents to visitors and strangers.”

The praise of a hero for his liberality is of frequent occurrence in Welsh poetry. In the *Book of Taliessin* Urien Reged is particularly commended for this quality. He is

One that provides  
Wine and bounty and mead.<sup>1</sup>

The poet speaks confidently :

Urien will not refuse me  
The lands of Llwyvenydd.  
Mine is their wealth,  
Mine are the festivals,  
Mine is the produce,  
Mine are the metals,  
And its rich productions.  
Mead out of buffalo horns  
And good in abundance,  
From the best prince,  
The most generous that has been heard of.<sup>2</sup>

Many similar passages might be quoted, but these are enough for our purpose.

<sup>1</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 99. See above, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 348.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 352.

Of Arthur's generosity we have a number of instances. At his marriage it was proclaimed that he "wolde yeve any man the yefte that the wolde aske." Whenever he held high feast at one of his palaces it was his custom to grant any boon that was asked. Thus it was when Gareth came, craving meat and drink for a year; nor it is ever recorded that he refused anyone.

14. Modesty is peculiarly a virtue of civilization. Among all primitive and semi-barbaric peoples it is customary for men to boast loudly of their own powers and achievements. In a rude state of society, where individuals have little consideration for each other, if a man does not declare his own merits they are likely to be unappreciated, or so he seems to feel.

Thus it was, among the early Germans, that a part of the recognized order of the feast was the interchange of boasts by the warriors, when each celebrated his own deeds or declared what he would do. The modest hero of chivalry, "meek as is a maid," was no ideal of theirs. Beowulf introduces himself to Hrothgar with an abrupt declaration of his own renown:

"Thou Hrothgar hail! Hygelac's I  
kinsman and follower. Fame a plenty  
have I gained in youth!"

He explains that he has heard of Grendel's depredations, and continues:

"So my vassals advised me well,—  
brave and wise, the best of men,—  
O sovran Hrothgar, to seek thee here,  
for my nerve and my might they knew full well.  
Themselves had seen me from slaughter come  
blood-flecked from foes, where five I bound  
and that wild brood worsted."

<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 407-409.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 415-421.

He also, as we have seen, boasts frankly of his swimming-match with Breca, when reproached by Unferth with defeat.

Before his last fight he enumerates to his followers all his previous exploits, and finishes

"I have lived through many  
wars in my youth; now once again,  
old folk-defender, feud will I seek,  
do doughty deeds, if the dark destroyer  
forth from his cavern come to fight me."

Cuchulainn is not more modest than Beowulf. On his first meeting with Emer, he speaks loudly in his own praise:

"Alone I make combat against forty. . . . From dread of me, warriors avoid fords and battle-fields. Hosts and multitudes and many armed men flee before the terror of my face. . . . I direct the judgments of all the men of Ulster, and, through the training of Sencha, (my decisions) are unalterable. . . . I can stand up to any man in valour, in prowess, in wisdom, in splendour, in cleverness, in justice, in boldness."

At Bricriu's feast he boldly demands that he be acknowledged as champion of all the warriors there. "'I wish,' replied Cuchulainn, 'to have for myself the royalty of the warriors of Ireland and the portion of the hero without contest; finally, for my wife, the precedence forever before all the women of Ulster.'"

He vaunts his prowess to Fergus, when the latter seeks to dissuade him from the combat with Ferdia:

Land is none, nor battle-field,  
Where to his my strength must yield.\*

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<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 2511-2515.

<sup>2</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, V, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup>Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 122.

When Ferdia appears, he exchanges boasts with him, describing how he will defeat and humiliate him before Medb's host:

They shall see me meet thee,  
Count the strifes that greet thee,  
Watch as down I beat thee,  
Drowning, suffering.<sup>1</sup>

There is little boasting in the Welsh prose tales. The heroes of the *Mabinogion* seem modest enough. Kilhwch, however, seems quite confident of himself when he answers Yspaddaden Penkawr. The latter requires of him, as a condition to the winning of the hand of his daughter, Olwen, the performance of a great number of seemingly impossible tasks, but to each new demand he returns the invariable reply: "It will be easy for me to do this, although thou mayest think it will not be easy.'"<sup>2</sup>

Boasting is more frequent in the Welsh poems. It is common for the bard to extol himself. Thus Taliessin:

I came to Deganwy to contend  
With Maelgwn, the greatest in delinquencies,  
I liberated my lord in the presence of the distributor,  
Elphin the sovereign of greatly aspiring ones.  
There are to me three chairs regular, accordant,  
And until doom they will continue with the singers.<sup>3</sup>

And again:

Am I not a candidate for fame with the listened song  
In Caer Pedryvan, in the isle of the strong door?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>*Mabinogion*, p.113.

<sup>3</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 265.

In the *Death-Song of Uthyr Pendragon*, he is represented as recounting his deeds and various powers:

Is it not I that will defend my sanctuary?  
 In separating with the sons of wrath.  
 Have I not been accustomed to blood about the wrathful,  
 A sword-stroke daring against the sons of Cawrnur?  
 \* \* \* \* \*

Is it not I that have destroyed a hundred Caers?  
 Is it not I that slew a hundred governors?  
 Is it not I that have given a hundred veils?  
 Is it not I that cut off a hundred heads?  
 Is it not I that gave to Henpen  
 The tremendous sword of the enchanter?  
 \* \* \* \* \*

I am a bard, and I am a harper,  
 I am a piper, and I am a crowder,  
 Of seven score musicians the very great  
 Enchanter.<sup>1</sup>

Modesty, however, is very important in the chivalric ideal of the Middle Ages. There it received a stronger emphasis than in any other period. Modesty, with the ancients, meant restraint from boasting on the one hand, and from self-depreciation of the other. To modern men it has come to have almost the same meaning again. But in the Middle Ages the ideal was extreme humility. The knight must not seem aware of his merits or his deserts: he must never boast, but always disclaim praise.

Arthur is becomingly modest as a youth. When he had pulled the sword from the stone, Sir Ector and Sir Kay knelt to him. "Allas said Arthur myne own dere fader and broder why knele ye to me!" Nor had he lost his humility after he had become king and had performed great exploits in battle. He was still diffident of his own merits. A damsel girt with a sword came to the court, asking that he and his knights essay to pull out the sword, for she must wear it until some knight who was a "passyng

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 42.

good man of his handes and of his dedes withoute vylanye or trecherye and without treason," should free her from her burden.

This is a grete merueill said Arthur/ yf this be sothe/ I wille my self assaye to drawe oute the sword/ not presumynge vpon my self that I am the best knyghte but that I will begynne to drawe at your swerd in gyuyng example to alle the Barons that they shall assay euerychone after other when I haue assayed it/<sup>1</sup>

In like wise he speaks deprecatingly to the mother of Sir Urre, who had brought him to Arthur's court to be healed, for he could never recover "vntil the best knyghte of the world had serched his woundes."

And wete yow wel said king Arthur. . . . . I shalle begynne to handle hym and serche vnto my power not presumyng vpon me that I am soo worthy to hele youre sone by my dedes/ but I wille courage other men of worshyp to doo as I wylle doo/<sup>2</sup>

The knight's humility is essentially a Christian virtue. It is based upon the idea of the necessary unworthiness of the whole race of mankind,—the doctrine of original sin. The pagan or semi-Christian peoples of earlier times could never feel this. They were proud of their achievements, of their own worthiness, and they wanted others to know it. They had no conviction of their debased and fallen condition to render their greatest deeds vain and empty things. Nowhere is the influence of mediaeval Christianity upon the chivalric conceptions more strongly shown than in this ideal of modesty.

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<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 789.

## IV.

## SOCIAL QUALITIES

15. The heroes which we are studying are the expression of the ideals of men not only as individuals but also as members of society. Our study would be incomplete did it fail to include an examination of the social ideals manifest in the relationships of the heroes to their fellow-men. To be sure, the personal virtues which we have just considered have their social values and implications. But there are certain more particularly social aspects in which we may study these characters.

16. Among these social aspects, one of the more important is the attitude of men toward women. This has sometimes claimed rather too much attention in our day, the place of women in any particular civilization being even made a sort of standard for measuring the height of that civilization. This may be approximately valid in the consideration of modern peoples, but it would be quite unsound to attempt to apply it universally, in all periods of the world's history. However, it is certainly an important point to be considered in the characterization of any civilization.

Whatever the importance of women in primitive Germanic society, they were of little importance in Germanic legend. Romantic love the Germans knew not; hence the wooing of a woman as the main theme of a story would have been absurd to them. Nor is the hero's reaction to women of importance. Where women are introduced, it is quite casually. *Wealtheow*, *Freawaru*, *Hygd*, all move graciously through the banquet hall, bearing the wine-cup. *Beowulf* treats them and speaks of them with the utmost respect; he accepts presents from *Wealtheow* and bestows them upon *Hygd*. But further than this he has no relations with them. As real actors in the story, they simply do not exist.



Women in Celtic legend are of far more importance. It is Medb's jealousy of her husband's possessions that causes the *Táin bó Cuailgne*. Cuchulainn has various relations of love and enmity with many different women, from Emer to the Morrighu. He cannot be said, in general, to display any particular chivalry in his attitude toward them. Certainly his treatment of Aife<sup>1</sup> is quite the reverse of chivalrous. He deserts his wife at one time for Fand, the fairy-woman, who has fallen in love with him. When Emer, with fifty women of Ulster, armed with knives, surprises him at his tryst with Fand, he refuses to fight with her:

I avoid thee, O lady, as heroes  
Avoid to meet friends in the strife.<sup>2</sup>

He is chivalrous to that extent, at least.

There is not much gentleness or forbearance in his conduct toward the Morrighu. "‘You are making a fool of me!’ said Cuchullin. And he made a leap into the chariot. He put his two feet on her two shoulders and his spear on the parting of her hair.’"<sup>3</sup> Nor does he show reverence for women, when he strikes down Locha, Medb's handmaid, mistaking her for her mistress by reason of the crown she is wearing.<sup>4</sup>

Women play an even more prominent role in the Welsh tales. Rhiannon, of the quick wit and pleasant conversation, the malicious but beautiful Arianrod, the gentle Branwen, lovely, false Blodeuwedd, whom Math and Gwydion shaped from flowers,—all play important parts in the *Mabinogion*. The attitude of the heroes to them is chivalric. Bendigeid Vran invades Ireland to avenge his sister Branwen, when she is mistreated by her husband.<sup>5</sup> Most chivalrous is the bearing of Pwyll toward the wife of Arawn.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>D' Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, V, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I, p. 80. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>D' Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, III, p. 33.

A gentle courtesy marks Manawyddan's treatment of Kicva, his stepson's wife.

When Kicva the daughter of Gwyn Gloyw saw that there was no one in the palace but herself and Manawyddan, she sorrowed so that she cared not whether she lived or died. And Manawyddan saw this. "Thou art in the wrong," said he, "if through fear of me thou grievest thus. I call Heaven to witness that thou hast never seen friendship more pure than that which I will bear thee, as long as Heaven will that thou shouldst be thus. I declare to thee that were I in the dawn of youth I would keep my faith unto Pryderi, and unto thee also will I keep it. Be there no fear upon thee, therefore," said he, "for Heaven is my witness that thou shalt meet with all the friendship thou canst wish, and that it is in my power to show thee, as long as it shall please Heaven to continue us in this grief and woe."

Woman characters are of even more frequent occurrence in the *Morte Darthur* than in the early Welsh tales, and, as everyone knows, they occupy very important places in the stories. The ideal of romantic love played a very large part in mediaeval chivalry, and the hero's attitude toward women was important in consequence. The knight who treated women discourteously was detested: violence toward a woman was the blackest stain upon a man's honor. Woman was exalted as superior to man: the pedestaled heroine is the creation of mediaeval romance.

Arthur himself did not perform many feats of knight-errantry; a throned sovereign could not very well ride about the country rescuing distressed damsels. He did avenge the death of the lady Helen of Brittany upon her slayer.<sup>2</sup> But his chief achievement in the cause of women was the upholding of the chivalric ideal and the impressing of it upon his knights. He swore them "alweyes to doo damoysels/ and gentylywymmen socour vpon payne of dethe/"<sup>3</sup> and thus very definitely made this ideal a vital one for the whole order of the Round Table.

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<sup>1</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 118.

He was greatly angered when Sir Balin slew the Lady of the Lake in his presence:

Allas for shame sayd Arthur why haue ye done so/ ye haue shamed me and al my Courte/ for this was a lady that I was be holden to/ and hither she came vnder my sauf conduyte/ I shalle neuer foryeue you that trespas/ . . . what cause soo euer ye had said Arthur ye shold haue forborne her in my presence/ therfor thynke not the contrary ye shalle repente it/ for suche another despyte had I neuer in my Courte/ therfor withdrawe yow oute of my Courte in al hast that ye may/<sup>1</sup>

The characteristic Teutonic attitude toward woman is seen to be one of respect. She has an honored place, but she is expected to keep that place strictly. She has little to do with the serious affairs of a man's life. The Celtic woman, on the other hand, often met man upon equal terms in his own sphere of action. From Boadicea to Helen MacGregor, warlike women have been frequent figures in Celtic history, so it is not strange that we should find such amazons as Medb, Scathach, and Aife playing important roles in the earliest Celtic literature. Such conditions made it possible for women to take active parts in stories, but, strangely or not, among the Celts there seems to have been less respect for women, *qua* women, and also for the marriage relation, than among the Germans.

The Welsh stories show a more chivalric attitude toward the feminine sex, but they are later than the Irish, and they probably represent the aboriginal Celtic spirit less than that spirit after it had been influenced and modified by the spirit of chivalry.<sup>2</sup>

The mediaeval attitude toward women seems to be due to both Celtic and German influences. The Celtic genius contributed the myths which became the material for mediaeval authors of all nations, and in these stories women took prominent parts. The Germanic spirit of tenderness and respect placed them on a higher level than the men.

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<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*, p. 344.

Christianity, and particularly the cult of the Virgin Mary and of various other female saints, also contributed a great deal toward refining the more violent and distasteful elements out of the tales. Thus we find men regarding women no longer either as beings to be respected in their own distinct sphere, or as equals to be treated without respect unless they were able to enforce it, but as creatures of a higher order, to be worshipped with devotion and saved from the roughness of conflict and hardship. It was then that man erected woman upon the pedestal from which she has even yet scarcely got down.

17. The primitive conception of justice is a narrow one. The earliest notion of it is the *lex talionis*, founded on the human instinct for revenge. As society develops and property comes into existence, customs of inheritance arise, which are the germs of later laws. It is long before justice gets beyond these two points of compensation for injury done and security of inheritance.

Among the Germanic peoples there was a complicated system of fines for injuries. Long lists of such fines may be found in the earliest Anglo-Saxon codes.<sup>1</sup> In *Beowulf* allusion is several times made to the custom of paying *wergild* or "man-price" to the relatives of a slain man.<sup>2</sup> Inheritance rights were well-organized also, though no reference is made to them in the poem. These folk-customs were interpreted and justice administered by the *witena-gemot*, or council of the tribal elders. The king was never a judge.<sup>3</sup> His function was military: he was the "protector of the people" in a quite literal sense only. We are told of Beowulf that he was a "good king", that he

land and hoard  
ever defended from all his foes,  
furthered his folk's weal,<sup>4</sup>

but we are nowhere told of his justice.

<sup>1</sup>Thorpe, B., *Ancient Laws and Institutions of England*.

<sup>2</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 470, 2441 ff.

<sup>3</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 3004-3006.

<sup>4</sup>Gummers, *Germanic Origins*, pp. 291 ff.

Of Celtic law, d'Arbois de Jubainville says: "The most ancient monuments of Germanic law and of Roman law offer us the judicial form of societies already perfected and where the public power has already acquired much more vigor than among the Celts. . . . It [Celtic law] is nothing else than the law not only of the Celtic race, but of the Indo-Europeans before the revolutions which were brought about little by little by the slow but continuous progress of the public authority. It is the law which preceded the innumerable conquests accomplished at the expense of the initial independence of families by the idea, so often beneficent, and sometimes tyrannical, which is expressed today by that redoubtable word: the State."

Though primitive, the code was elaborate. Its interpretation was the function of certain professional judges, who made a special study of it. Persons who had a controversy to be decided could choose any judge they wished, or refuse a judge and take the law into their own hands, as seemed good to them.<sup>1</sup> Cuchulainn seems to have received the training of a judge, from a passage in the *Wooing of Emer*:

"Fair-speeched Sencha has taught me, so that I am strong, wise, swift, deft. I am prudent in judgment, my memory is good. Before wise men, I (make answer to) many; I give heed to their arguments. I direct the judgments of the men of Ulster, and, through the training of Sencha, (my decisions) are unalterable."<sup>2</sup>

In the *Sick-Bed of Cuchulain* we find an account of his instructions to Lugaid of the Red Stripes, when the latter was about to be made king over all Ireland, and the words there put into his mouth evidence the Irish ideal of a just ruler:

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<sup>1</sup>D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Des attributions judiciaires de l'autorité publique chez les Celtes*, *Revue Celtique*, VII, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup>Hull, *Cuchulainn Saga*, p. 66.

"Let not prescription close on illegal possession. Let witnesses be examined as to who is the rightful heir of the land. Let the historians combine to act uprightly before you. Let the lands of the brethren, and their increase, be ascertained in their lifetime. Let the genealogical trees be added to as children are born. Let the living be called to their possessions: on the security of their oaths let the habitations of their ancestors be revived. Let the heir be established in his lawful patrimony; let strangers be driven out by force of arms."

This suggests that one of the functions of a Celtic king was the guarding of the security of property rights.

In the *mabinogi* of *Pwyll, Prince of Dyved*, when Pwyll, disguised as Arawn, overcomes the latter's foe, Havgan, he is hailed as king over all Annwvyn. "It is right," says he, "that he who comes humbly should be received graciously, but he that doth not come with obedience shall be compelled by the force of swords.'" So pleased are all with his justice and moderation that they do him homage at once, and "the next day by noon" the two kingdoms are in his power.

Math, son of Mathonwy, shows his justice in re-establishing Llew Llaw Gyffes in his kingdom, after he has been transformed and his place usurped by his wife's lover. At the same time Gwydion ap Don metes out condign punishment to the unfaithful wife, transforming her into an owl.'

The justice of Arthur is one of his notable characteristics. The redressing of wrongs was a considerable part of the occupation of himself and his knights, and he kept faithfully the oath he took at his coronation. Malory describes that event as follows:

And so anon was the coronacyon made/ And there was he sworne vnto his lordes & the comyns for to be a true kyng to stand with true Iustyce fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf/ Also thene he made alle lordes that held of the crowne to come in/ and to do seruyce as they oughte to doo/ And many complayntes were made vnto sir Arthur of grete wrongs that were done syn the dethe of kyng Vther/ of many londes that were bereued lordes/ knyghts/ ladyes & gentilmen/ wherfor kyng Arthur maade the londes to be yeuen ageyne to them that oughte hem/

<sup>1</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 43.

The principles of Arthur's justice are revealed also in the institution of the Round Table:

Thenne the kyng stablysshed all his knyghtes and gaf them that were of landes not ryche/ he gaf them londes/ and charged hem neuer to doo outragyoussyte nor mordre/ and alweyes to flee treason/ Also by no meane to be cruel/ but to gyue mercy vnto hym that asketh mercy vpon payn of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of kyng Arthur for euermore/ and alweyes to doo ladyes/ damoysels/ and gentylwymmen socour vpon payne of dethe/ Also that no man take no batails in a wrongful quarel for noo loue ne for noo worldes goodes/<sup>1</sup>

For an instance of Arthur's practical justice, we have his instructions to his troops on the return from the conquest of Rome. He "commaunded that noo man in payne of dethe shold not robbe ne take vytaylle/ ne other thyng by the way but that he shold pay therfore/" This sort of justice to a conquered people was far beyond the practice of even a much later time than Malory's.

The principles of justice to which Arthur subscribes in his coronation oath are of the same general nature as those that Cuchulainn enumerates. Both are concerned with property rights in land,—the practical everyday affairs of civil government. But in Arthur's instructions to his knights we find higher principles set forth. It is indeed the chivalric code, the rule of knightly conduct, which nowhere in mediaeval literature finds better expression than here.

18. The ideal of self-sacrifice for one's country or one's tribe is one that was popular in very early times. Among the Germanic peoples the ruler was ever the bulwark of his folk against invasion, the "people's protector," the "friend of his folk." Beowulf calls himself "old folk-defender." He lays down his life gladly in destroying the baleful creature that had plagued his nation and with his dying breath thanks the "Wielder-of-Wonders"

<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>*Beowulf*, l. 2513.

“for the grace that I give such gifts to my folk  
or ever the day of my death be run!  
Now I’ve bartered here for booty of treasure  
the last of my life so look ye well  
to the needs of my land!”

And Wiglaf prophesies the strife and invasion that will come when their enemies learn of his death,

“who land and hoard  
ever defended from all his foes,  
furthered his folk’s weal, finished his course  
a hardy hero.”

He seems in all things to have been an exemplary ruler, never sparing himself, but always bearing the brunt of strife, as when he will not allow his warriors to accompany him against the dragon. A theory, indeed, has been hazarded that the poem was written expressly as a model for princes.<sup>4</sup> Whether that be the case or not, it could have done duty as such among the Germanic peoples.

Self-sacrifice was not so frequently exalted among the Irish, who were more individualistic than the Anglo-Saxons. The warrior or king fought more for his own glory than for the defense of his people. Cuchulainn, indeed, defended Ulster against the men of Erin, until he was no longer able to fight. He sent a message to Conachar’s men by his step-father, Sualtach, in which he recounted his sufferings for his country’s sake.

“Tell Ulster that for the future themselves must come and follow up their Táin seeing that I no more am able to defend and rescue them. Because from the Monday before *samhain*, etc. [*sic*],<sup>4</sup> in the gaps and passes of Conaille-Muirthemne I have stood against the four great provinces of Erin, daily slaying a man at a ford [*i. e.* in single combat,] and nightly a hundred warriors; while for thirty nights I had not manly fairplay of single combat. None comes to succour, none to comfort me; yet my hurts are such that I may not endure to have my fighting vesture touch my skin. They are ‘fetter-

<sup>4</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 2797-2801.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 3004-3007.

<sup>4</sup>Earle, John, *The Deeds of Beowulf*. Oxford, 1892.

<sup>4</sup>See above, p. 23.



hooks' that maintain my mantle overhead; dried sops of grass they are that stuff my wounds; from crown to sole of me is not a spot on which a needle's point might rest but has some hurt; in all my body not an individual hair does grow but a dew of red blood garnishes its point, only excepting my left arm that bears my shield, and even that bears three times fifty wounds."<sup>7</sup>

When Cuchulainn's foes sought to compass his death, they made by magic an army out of thistles, puff-balls, and dry leaves, which seemed to be invading Ulster, knowing that he would not suffer the invasion without an attempt to hinder it.' Thus he was induced to attack them and so was slain by the men of Erin.

The Welsh held in honor the king or chieftain who sacrificed himself for his country. In the tale of *Lludd and Llevelys*, Lludd did battle with the giant who plagued his kingdom by carrying away provisions,<sup>8</sup> as valiantly as ever a Germanic hero could have done. But this sort of episode is not common among the prose tales, for they are romantic in spirit, and romance commonly concerns itself more with individuals than with masses of people.

The Welsh poetry, however, being more directly related to history, frequently commends a leader for his diligence in the defense of his country. Such praise is given to Urien:

That was the shield of his country,  
That was a wheel in battle,  
That was a ready sword in his country's battles.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise in the *Gododin* we have mentioned the

Leader, director, and bulwark of all that are of the same  
language,  
Tudvwlch, the subduer in battle, the destroyer of Caers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 203.      <sup>8</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 240.      <sup>5</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 356.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 425.

The lament for Cyndylan exalts him as the defender of his town:

Cyndylan with heart like the fire of spring,  
By the common oath, in the midst of the common speech,  
Defending Tren, that wasted town!

Cyndylan, bright pillar of his country,  
Chain-bearer, obstinate in the fight,  
Protected Tren, the town of his father!

Cyndylan, bright intelligence departed,  
Chain-bearer, obstinate in the host,  
Protected Tren as long as he was living.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur, in the earlier romances, is chiefly the defender of his country, the glorious ruler, who subdued all Britain to his sovereignty. Though the bulk of Malory's work is concerned rather with the romantic adventures of the knights of his court, the earlier feature still persists, and we have much, particularly in the earlier books, of Arthur's wars, offensive and defensive. When the news is brought to him of the invasion of the island by five kings, who "brente and slewe clene afore hem/ both Cytees and castels that it was pyte to here/" he resolves to repel them, but sighs for the toil that he has spent in holding his kingdom.

Allas sayd Arthur yet had I neuer reste one monethe syn I was crowned kyng of this land/ Now shalle I neuer reste tyl I mete with tho kynges in a fayre feld/ that I make myn auowe for my true lyege people shalle not be destroyed in my defaulte/ goo with me who wille and abyde who that wylle/<sup>2</sup>

This ideal of self-sacrifice is thus seen to be common to the Teutonic and Celtic peoples, but of much more prominence among the former. The grave, prudent, and responsible temper of the Germans was more responsive to the idea that the welfare of the state is higher than that of the individual, than the lighter, more volatile spirit of the Celts.

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 449.

<sup>2</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 120.

The historian, Mommsen, speaks of the Celts as deficient in "earnest public spirit." "Good soldiers but bad citizens," he says, "the Celts have shaken all states and have founded none."<sup>1</sup> This criticism of the Celtic character, though from a German standpoint, is a valid one. The Celtic spirit has been consistently too individualistic to make a stable government attainable by a purely Celtic people. The Germans, on the other hand, have shown themselves capable of even too great a devotion to the interests of the state. The apparent impracticability of self-government by a united Ireland is a modern illustration of the one, while the deplorable submission of the disciplined and socialized German people to governmental mechanism exemplifies the other.

## V.

### PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

19. In a general way, all the characteristics that we have discussed hitherto may be considered as bearing upon the philosophy of life of the peoples whose ideals we are examining. But, more particularly, we may gather from the speeches of characters, as well as from their actions, the philosophical principles which were those of the peoples who created them. Both sources are important. In one sense, a man's whole life may be said to define his philosophy, for it is there that his ideals find their actualization; or, if they do not, we must assume that they are not truly vital to him. But, in another sense, this is not a fair test to apply, for ideals, to be truly ideals, must be beyond attainment, and a man must be measured by his dream rather than by his accomplishment.

20. The Teutonic temperament was a slow and reflective one. The early Germans found opportunity, even in

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<sup>1</sup>Mommsen, *History of Rome*, I, p. 420.

their strenuous existence, to muse upon the problems of life as they were presented to them. They were too truthful and too practical to delude themselves concerning the world: no visionary enthusiasm could be theirs. They had to make a hard fight against the multitudinous hostile forces in the world about them, and they saw but too clearly that, though the tribe might hold its own, the individual must inevitably succumb in the struggle. This is the view which finds expression in *Beowulf*. Says Professor Dixon—

Nothing can be clearer than that *Beowulf* belongs to a period in which nature was felt as unsubdued, in which the elements were unfriendly. His race inhabited the narrow lands, the ridge of unceasing war—the unexplored ocean before him, at his back the equally unexplored and threatening woods. The forest had not yet been cleared nor the protecting walls of the city built. Northern Germany in the pre-Christian centuries can hardly have been a more kindly region than the central Africa of today. The hero in *Beowulf* stands at bay with Nature, exposed to the attacks of strange, uncouth, silent foes. . . .

It is at best a losing battle in which mankind is engaged, and *Beowulf* is throughout his life the leader of a forlorn hope. Again and again he is successful in spite of odds, foot by foot he grapples with destiny unafraid, but he knows that there is but one way, and that he must tread at last the pathway to the shades. The clear-sighted philosophy of the old English epic, undimmed by any dreams of hope, disturbed by no metaphysical consolations, has in it the more than Roman fortitude that looks unflinchingly into the burning eyes of Truth.<sup>1</sup>

This is a striking interpretation of the mood of the life depicted in *Beowulf*. The natural reaction of the Germanic temperament to such an environment was to persuade that man's life was completely under the domination of an inscrutable fate. To seek escape was folly; to bewail it was weakness: to meet his appointed hour gloriously was the proper ambition for a man.

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<sup>1</sup>Dixon, W. MacNeile, *English Epic and Heroic Poetry*, (1912), p. 71.

"It beseems us better  
 friends to avenge than fruitlessly mourn them.  
 Each of us all must his end abide  
 in the ways of the world; so win who may  
 glory ere death! When his days are told,  
 that is the warrior's worthiest doom."<sup>1</sup>

In these lines we have expressed the hero's philosophy of life and death.

Since man's individual life was so circumscribed by fate, and the sphere of his achievements so limited, it was only through the tribe that he could accomplish anything. The Germans seem always to have felt strongly the dependence of man on man, and their closely-knit social organization, in which each individual submitted to the collective will of the tribe and was willing to sacrifice himself for the general good, is conspicuous from the earliest times. No Epicurean philosophy, theirs, no exaltation of physical ease and pleasure; but rather a Stoic self-abnegation. Not that they were abstemious: they took their pleasures as strenuously as they took their labors, and feasted and drank prodigiously when occasion offered. But for the most part they lived hard and died hard; there was little of luxury to corrupt them, and they scorned soft delights as a surrender to weakness.

This life of ceaseless strife against unfriendly nature and hostile men was not alleviated by any hope of a happier future existence.

"The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to that swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in the winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he had emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 1384-1389.

<sup>2</sup>Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*.

Thus spoke the Northumbrian councillor to his king, after hearing for the first time the Christian gospel which seemed to promise something for the future of which they had hoped nothing. Even Christianity did not greatly change the old spirit. Though a number of passages alluding to the Christian faith have been inserted in *Beowulf*, there is no attempt to alleviate the stern fatalism of the hero's last words:

"Thou are end and remnant of all our race,  
the Waegmunding name. For Wyrð hath swept them,  
all my line, to the land of doom,  
earls in their glory: I after them go."

The anticlimatical statement a few lines below,

From his bosom fled  
his soul to seek the saint's reward,<sup>1</sup>

is an obvious bit of patchwork.

21. The Irish view of life was a less somber one. The Irish environment, the kindly climate of the Emerald Isle, was less harsh and unfriendly than that of the Germanic tribes among whom *Beowulf* arose. This acted favorably upon the Celtic temperament and made of them the people of indomitable cheerfulness that we still see. They were not, indeed, free from the fatalism which nearly all peoples seem to feel in some measure, but it had no such power over them as over the Germans. We find in their literature no parallels for the strikingly frequent allusions to *Wyrð* in the Anglo-Saxon poems, nor for the sense of evanescence and of impending destiny which pervades the latter.

The Irish fatalism is illustrated in the *geasa* (*gessa*) or tabus of certain warriors. These were in the form of prohibitions laid (usually) upon a child at its birth by the gods or its parents. *Geasa* were laid upon Conaire by his father, the bird-god Nemglan. Cuchulainn likewise lays

<sup>1</sup>*Beowulf*, ll. 2813-2816.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 2819-2820.

*geasa* upon the son which is to be borne to him by Aife. When the gods are offended by Conaire they force him to break his *geasa*, which inevitably results in his death.' On the other hand, Connlaoch is destroyed by adherence to his *geasa*, for he refuses to tell his name to Cuchulainn and is slain by him.'

By whom Cuchulainn's *geasa* were imposed is not explained. The prohibition against eating hound's flesh had some relation to his name.<sup>1</sup> Before he has broken them he has fore-knowledge of the event: "Then was he certified that his *gessa* were destroyed, and his endowments perished." He says to Cathbad, " 'Henceforth is no more cause to guard my life: my span is ended, my *gessa* done away with.' " His prophecy is fulfilled, he breaks his *geasa* and meets death.

Prophecy, which implies the predestination of the future, is frequent in the Irish tales. It is notable that divination plays no part in German legend. It was perhaps that the Germanic temperament was too unimaginative to conceive of fore-knowledge as possible. But it seems to be just this unknowableness which gives the German *Wyrd* its peculiar gloom and horror. Though knowledge of fate does not make its circumvention possible, it seems to rob it of its more terrible aspect. The Greeks and the Celts managed to be light-hearted in spite of their fatalism, as the Germans could not.

Fate certainly did not weigh upon the Irish. They were not afraid to defy the wrath of the gods, as Cuchulainn did that of the Morrighu,<sup>2</sup> and were often successful in overcoming them, as he was.<sup>3</sup> The Irish, indeed, were always upon easy terms with their gods. The Celtic pantheon was a numerous and a lively one, and much of Irish legend concerns the relations of the *Tuatha de Danann* with mortals.

<sup>1</sup>MacCulloch, *Celtic Mythology*, (1918), pp. 75ff.

<sup>2</sup>D' Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de littérature celtique*, V, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 166.

They loved them, married them, fought for or against them, and on the whole behaved very much like them. Seldom did their wrath entail such dire consequences as in Conaire's case.

Among the examples of human intercourse with the gods are the many visits of men to the divine land. It is variously located—"in the *sid*, on a mysterious island, or beneath the waters; or the gods create it on earth or produce it by glamour to mortal eyes."<sup>1</sup> It is always described as a beautiful plain, with glittering trees, filled with the sound of sweet music. There dwelt beautiful women who welcomed the mortal sojourner in their realm. There was no sin, nor sorrow, nor death, but all peace and happiness and immortal youth. A man might become immortal by dwelling there; though this was reserved for the few fortunate heroes.

This Elysium was not identical with the paradise to which all looked forward after death.<sup>2</sup> The Celtic land of the dead was a subterranean kingdom, "in all respects a *replica* of this world, but . . . happier."<sup>3</sup> Here the dead lived on in the body—the Celts had no conception of disembodied ghosts<sup>4</sup>—carrying on the pursuits, and enjoying the pleasures, of their earthly life, but without the troubles that had assailed them here.

This conception of the blissful state of the dead was thought by the Romans to be the source of the recklessness of the Celts in battle.<sup>5</sup> It may, indeed, have had something to do with their gaiety in the face of death. When Cuchulainn went to his last battle, "he turned his back on Emania, and in joy and gladness, cheerful and void of care, went on his way; his weariness also, his delusion and his gloom passed from him."<sup>6</sup> The Germans were no less courageous than the Celts: Beowulf met death steadfast and unwavering,—but it can hardly be said that he met it joyfully.

<sup>1</sup>MacCulloch, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>MacCulloch, *Religion of the Ancient Celts*, pp. 340 ff, 374 ff.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 334 ff.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>6</sup>Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 249.



Thus the Irish view of life is seen to be characterized by optimism. They found this world a pleasant one, with plenty of carousing, roystering, and fighting, and they looked forward to a similar but pleasanter life by and by when they should weary of battle and its hardships, and be ready for an eternity of ease and delight. There is something of the adolescent about this optimism. It is significant that Cuchulainn was not past his twenties when he fell. One can not imagine him growing old, as one can readily conceive Beowulf become a "hoary hero." Its youthfulness is the distinctive characteristic of the Celtic spirit, which sums up all the rest.

22. Much that has been said of the Irish philosophy applies equally to the Welsh. They shared the Celtic conception of a happy land of the dead, as well as the Celtic fatalism with its attendant belief in prophecy. The Welsh had no *geasa*, and their fatalism is less pronounced than that of the Irish, appearing chiefly in connection with the divination of the future.

One important Celtic belief which has not been mentioned is the belief in the possibility of rebirth. This appears in the Irish stories of Mongan and of Etain, and of the two swineherds in the *Táin bó Cuailgne*, and is elsewhere hinted at. But it is given great prominence in some of the Welsh mystical poems. It seems that the Celts did not hold a doctrine of universal transmigration, but only of its possibility in the case of gods or certain mortals.<sup>1</sup> Taliessin is one of whom many transformations are related. In the introduction to the *Battle of Godeu* he gives a long account of his previous incarnations:

I have been in a multitude of shapes,  
 Before I assumed a consistent form.  
 I have been a sword, narrow, variegated,  
 I will believe when it is apparent.  
 I have been a tear in the air,  
 I have been the dullest of stars.

<sup>1</sup>MacCulloch, *Religion of the Ancient Celts*, (1911), p. 348.

I have been a word among letters,  
 I have been a book in the origin.  
 I have been the light of lanterns,  
 A year and a half,  
 I have been a continuing bridge,  
 Over three score Abers.  
 I have been a course, I have been an eagle,  
 I have been a coracle in the seas:  
 I have been a compliant in the banquet.  
 I have been a drop in a shower;  
 I have been a sword in the grasp of the hand:  
 I have been a shield in battle.  
 I have been a string in a harp,  
 Disguised for nine years.  
 In water, in foam.  
 I have been sponge in the fire,  
 I have been wood in the covert.<sup>1</sup>

A similar passage in *Book of Taliessin*, XXV, begins

I have been a sow, I have been a buck, *etc.*<sup>2</sup>

In one of the poems in the rather late *Romance of Taliesin*, occurs a mystical account in which Christian conceptions are rather inconsistently mingled with the names of historical persons and of mythic Welsh deities:

I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,  
 On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell  
 I have borne a banner before Alexander;  
 I know the names of the stars from north to south;  
 I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distribu-  
     tor;  
 I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain;  
 I conveyed the Divine spirit to the level of the vale of  
     Hebron;  
 I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwydion.  
 I was instructor to Eli and Anoc;  
 I have been winged by the genius of the splendid crosier;  
 I have been loquacious prior to being gifted with speech;  
 I was at the place of crucifixion of the merciful Son of  
     God;  
 I have been three periods in the prison of Arianrod;  
 I have been the chief director of the work of the tower of  
     Nimrod;  
 I am a wonder whose origin is not known. *Etc.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 309.

<sup>3</sup>*Mabinogion*, p. 273.

The Welsh mysticism took kindly to Christian doctrines, as may be seen by the frequency with which the latter were given poetic expression by the bards. There is a mystical exaltation in a poem addressed to the Trinity, beginning

I will extol thee, the Trinity in the mysterious One,  
 Who is One and Three, a Unity of one energy,  
 Of the same essence and attributes, one God to be praised.  
 I will praise Thee, great Father, whose mighty works are  
 great;  
 To praise Thee is just; to praise Thee is incumbent on me.  
 The produce of poetry is the right of Eloi.  
 Hail, glorious Christ!  
 Father, and Son, and Spirit! Lord,  
 God, Adonai!<sup>1</sup>

Taliessin's *Song to the Great World* gives a poetical account of his own creation, in which he adds a peculiarly beautiful touch to the ordinary mediaeval Christian conception:

I will adore my Father,  
 My God, my strengthener,  
 Who infused through my head  
 A Soul to direct me.  
 Who has made for me in perception,  
 My seven faculties.  
 Of fire and earth,  
 And water and air,  
 And mist and flowers,  
 And southerly wind.<sup>2</sup>

23. Christian is the philosophy of the *Morte Darthur*, yet not wholly Christian. There is an element of pagan fatalism in the destruction of Arthur by his son, Mordred, which is prophesied by Merlin before the child's birth.<sup>3</sup> Here is material for a tragedy on the Greek model, but mediaeval romance knew nothing of Nemesis. Fatalistic, too, though with no more than the usual fatalism which surrounds the demise of a hero, are the events leading up

<sup>1</sup>Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, p. 511.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 539.

<sup>3</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 67.

to the death of Arthur. Gawain comes back from the dead to warn him against fighting on the morrow: 'truce is proclaimed, but is broken by the accident of a serpent biting a knight upon the heel.' Here again we can imagine how fraught with significance these omens would be in the hands of a Sophocles, but the mediaeval mind had little regard for the dramatic possibilities of a situation.

The Grail legend is the most purely Christian and mediaeval part of the Arthurian romances. The mystical significance of the Grail, the ecstasy which came from its contemplation, the religious ardor with which the knights devoted themselves to its quest,—all are and could be the product of nothing else than the spirit of mediaeval Christianity.

We see in the account of its first appearance all the mystery of an age which had unquestioning faith in miracles:

And soo after vpon that to souper/ and euery knygt sette in his owne place as they were to fore hand Thenne anone they herd crakynge and cryenge of thunder that hem thought the place shold alle to dryve/ In the myddes of this blast entred a sonne beaume more clerer by seuen tymes than euer they sawe daye/ And al they were alyghted of the grace of the holy ghoost/ thenne beganne euery knyghte to behold other/ & eyther sawe other by their semynge fayrer than euer they sawe afore/ Not for thenne there was no knyght myghte speke one word a grete whyl/ and soo they loked euery man on other as they had ben dome/ Thenne ther entred in to the halle the holy graile couerd with whyte samyte/ but ther was none myghte see hit/ nor who bare hit/ And there was al the halle fulfylled with good odoures/ and euery knygt had suche metes and drynkes as he best loued in this world/ And when the holy grayle had be borne thurgh the halle/ thenne the holy vessel departed sodenly that they wyst not where hit becam/ thenne had they alle brethe to speke/ And thenne the kynge yelded thankynges to god of his good grace that he sente them/ Certes said the kynge we oughte to thank oure lord ihesu gretely for that he hath shewed us this daye atte reuerence of this hyhe feest of Pentecost/

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<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 844.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 845.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 620.

The result of this mystic vision was that all the knights, following the example of Sir Gawain, vowed themselves to the quest of the Grail, to seek it till they should see it uncovered. Hard were the conditions to that achievement. "I warn yow playne," says the messenger of Nacien the hermit, "he that is not clene of his synnes/ he shalle not see the mysteryes of our lord Ihesu Cryste/" Of all the Round Table there were but three to achieve it fully,—Sir Bors, Sir Perceval, and Sir Galahad. The last personifies the ascetic ideal of chivalry, as Launcelot and Tristram embody its ideal of courtly love.

Arthur himself did not go upon the Grail quest, nor did he look upon it altogether with favor. The pure other-worldliness of the mystic spirit was not his: he saw only the prospective ruin of his earthly work in the breaking up of the Round Table, and mourned for it.

Allas said kynge Arthur vnto sir Gawayn ye haue nyghe slayne me withe the avowe and promesse that ye haue made/ For thurgh you ye haue berefte me the fayrest felauship and the truest of knyghthode that euer were sene to gyders in ony realme of the world/ For whanne they depart from hens I am sure/ they alle shalle neuer mete more in thys world/ for they shall dye many in the quest/ And soo it forthinketh me a lytel for I haue loued them as wel as my lyf wherfor hit shall greue me ryghte for the departeyon of this felauship/<sup>2</sup>

From first to last, the Round Table is Arthur's most important achievement. It is the symbol and the type of the institution of chivalry. Chivalry owed its life, as all things human do, to a compromise,—a compromise between its asceticism and the spirit of the world in it. The realization of its own ascetic ideal would have meant its extinction: hence the necessity of the compromise. None saw this more clearly than Arthur. He saw, too, that the value of an institution lies in its service to the world, especially, perhaps, when that service is rendered by opposing

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<sup>1</sup>Malory, *Morte Darthur*, I, p. 621.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 620.

the world. He felt that the existence of the institution was more important than the attainment of the highest spiritual bliss by the individuals that composed it.

In this he is opposed to the extreme tendencies of mediæval Christianity, representing its more reasonable aspect. And this is the philosophical significance of Arthur,—that he occupies the mean point, the compromise between mediæval sensuousness and asceticism. After all, his is the life, of all those in the romances clustered about his name and his court, that seems, at least from our point of view, most worth living. It was a clean life, compared to most, yet a sane life, not given to excesses of self-denial more than of self-indulgence, a life of devotion to the common good, to the establishing in men's minds and lives of worthy ideals of conduct. What though he failed in the end? None achieves complete success. His was a noble endeavor, to which all must yield the tribute of admiration.





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